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THE LIGHT OF HER COUNTENANCE

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BY
HJALMAR HJORTH BOYESEN

AUTHOR OF "GUNNAR," "IDYLS OF NORWAY,"
"A DAUGHTER OF THE PHILISTINES," ETC.

M 295137

NEW YORK
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1889

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NOTE.

SOME of the characters and scenes of the present novel made their first appearance in a novelette which I published anonymously in "Lippincott's Magazine" for May, 1888. Though the differences between the two stories seem to me more marked than their similarities, a family resemblance may be recognizable.

H. H. B.

SOUTHAMPTON, L. I., *July, 1889.*

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CHAPTER I.

VANITY OF VANITIES.

JULIAN BURROUGHS was reclining in a leather-covered easy-chair between a richly draped window and an oaken writing-table of elaborate workmanship. A drowsy wood-fire, breaking fitfully into flame, was burning between a pair of artfully twisted brass andirons. It filled the room with its ruddy glow and glistened on the many ornaments; but did not dispel the twilight.

Julian was weary—unutterably weary. He would have sworn, if it had not required too much of an exertion. His whole anatomy seemed to have collapsed; and his handsome face scarcely had the energy to retain any sort of definable expression. The corners of his mouth twitched now and then; and his half-closed eyes wandered among the luxurious appointments of the room with a look of languid disgust. He drew a long breath that half resembled a sigh, and slowly shook his head. Painful recollections emerged from his memory and made him shudder.

Julian Burroughs was a tall young man of about

thirty, of robust build, strong chest, and good proportions. There was an air of distinction about him even in his present *negligée*. The broad-striped red and white pajamas which enveloped him in their loose folds were made of the finest cashmere wool, and with their caressing softness invited abandonment to indolence and repose. A glance would convince you that Julian was a man of fashion who, without being finical, was careful in the choice and make of his garments. Everything that came in contact with his person had to have a pronounced style in harmony with the *tout ensemble*. The neat slippers of alligator skin which incased his feet had *chic*, and even the pattern of his silken socks had a kind of mysterious propriety which made any other pattern inconceivable. The peaked dark-brown beard and mustache, the straight nose, and a certain weary hauteur in his eyes contributed additional individualizing touches and completed the external guise of a very impressive personality. What made it impressive was, perhaps, not so much the traits which I have mentioned, as something that smoldered beneath the neutral appearances. It required a second glance to discover that there was a bold intention in the modeling of the young man's features; but polished off and refined by some secondary process which scarcely permitted the original vigor to shine through. It was a not uncommon Western type, at one or two removes from the soil; seen through the softening vail of civilization. It was the face of a man of strong passions not successfully held in check. A restless, energetic nature sometimes flashed forth in the brown eyes, and even in their present jaded look there was a kind of baffled eagerness which flared up

for a moment and vanished. A young girl once said of Julian Burroughs that he looked like a dissipated lion; and I am not sure but that that is the descriptive phrase which expresses him, for there was a suggestion of something leonine, not fully carried out, in the cast of his countenance. No mere vulgar *viveur*, bent upon getting the most out of life in the way of enjoyment, could have had such noble seriousness in his eyes in his best moments, nor such a burning disdain and disgust in his worst.

There was a certain daring even in the furniture of the room. The beautiful life-size figure called "La Vérité," copied by the master himself, which hung over the mantel, confronted you with her uncompromising mirror and her unblushing nudity as soon as you crossed the threshold. Everything else that might attract your eye was a trifle dwarfed by the great and startling painting. "Venus rising from the Foam of the Sea" was altogether too French to assert herself beside the resplendent "Vérité"; and St. Anthony tempted by a jaunty Parisian devil in marble was for the same reason doomed to insignificance. The costly hangings in old gold and peacock blue were meant, of course, to be subordinate, but furnished a rich setting to the snowy whiteness of the marble group. There were taste, a certain sophisticated caprice, and (as many thought) a bold desire to shock in the whole luxurious interior. These were the private quarters of a bachelor, to be sure, and not meant for promiscuous company. But then, on the other hand, these art treasures were too precious to be hidden, and, as a matter of fact, were frequently exhibited to persons of both sexes who professed freedom from conventional prejudice.

The *bric-à-brac*, particularly the Japanese lacquer and bronzes, were of unique value, and a small but famous Teniers representing a brawl at a village inn, attracted visitors who could afford to ignore the nakedness of "Truth." Mr. Burroughs himself was very proud of this little Dutch gem, and liked to show it, not because he gloried in his connoisseurship, but because of the distinction which the possession of such a rare and precious picture conferred upon him. He felt exceptional himself in having gratified such an expensive fancy; and there was nothing which to him made life more worth living than this sense of being exceptional.

While Mr. Burroughs sat dozing in his chair, there was a knock at his door which was twice repeated. A gruff "Come in" admitted a demure servant in a dress-coat, who carried a dozen letters on a silver tray. The young man roused himself with visible reluctance, took the letters, and left them lying unopened upon the table.

"Bring me a *krug* of seltzer," he said.

The servant bowed mutely and backed out of the door. When he returned with the beverage his master handed him a key to a cupboard in the next room, and he went without further instruction and reappeared with a graded glass and a bottle of cognac. The process of mixing was a delicate one, but was satisfactorily accomplished. Burroughs drank the contents of the glass with deliberation, and then, as his eyes fell upon his servitor, remarked:

"Jackson, you know I don't allow any servant in my employ to wear a mustache. If you don't shave off that stubble before to-morrow you may consider yourself discharged."

Jackson bowed again, but ventured no remonstrance.

"Anything else, sir?" he asked.

"No; you may go."

The stimulant revived Julian's drooping spirits, and he presently straightened himself up in his chair and began to look over his letters. Most of them were invitations. Two emitted a vague perfume which suggested *billets doux*, and only one had the appearance of a *bona-fide* epistle. The post-mark Roma and the canceled Italian stamps of the latter aroused a languid interest in the jaded young man. He broke the seal, the crest of which he recognized, and began to read. The writer, George Crampton, was the man of all men whom he had been fondest of in his callow days, and a serener and more mature friendship had survived the effervescence of youthful feeling. Crampton had been Julian's chum at Harvard and had committed no end of follies, from the consequences of which his friend had taken pleasure in extricating him. He had now inherited a scanty competence, which would just have sufficed for any one else to starve on; but this bold enthusiast, exulting in his exemption from soul-crippling toil, took the first steamer for Italy and proclaimed his intention henceforth to live like the lilies of the field, which sow not, neither do they spin. He would have liked, above all things, to become an artist, but feared that his chance of startling the world in that capacity was past. He was aware that a man who at twenty-five is yet in doubt as to his choice of profession has not much prospect of attaining eminence. As far as the world is concerned it is of very little consequence what he chooses. Crampton, realiz-

ing this, could nevertheless not abandon his pet ambition. He had no delusion about his talent. Seeing no chance of becoming a good artist, he had the courage to become a poor one. He called himself an amateur, an art critic, collector, and what not, but pegged away with a kind of humorous persistence at canvases which he had not the hardihood to offer for sale.

To Burroughs he had been of great service. Living alternately in Rome and Florence, and being continually in the way of making artistic discoveries, he had received *carte blanche* from his friend to buy anything that he deemed worth buying. The Teniers and half the precious bronzes would never have found their way across the Atlantic, if Crampton had not possessed his keen scent for ancient treasures and an unerring judgment of their values. He was continually mousing in obscure palaces and out-of-the-way shops, and was regularly in the habit of reporting his finds to his friend and patron. It was therefore a discourse on Italian art, on the spirituality of Fra Angelico or the sensuousness of Tintoretto, or something in that line, which Burroughs expected when he broke the elaborate yellow seal of Crampton's epistle; but the very look of the sheet, scratched over with thick, excited letters chasing each other pell-mell across the page, showed him that the writer had been laboring under an unusual agitation. Something beside Madonnas and *bric-à-brac* had interfered with his repose.

"CARISSIMO MIO FRATELLO," the letter began, "I have seen a vision which mounts like strong wine to my head. I swear to you, Julian, that as long as you haven't seen that girl—that woman—that goddess—

call her what you like—you have no right to hold up your nose and call yourself a connoisseur of the sex. It is of course the insanest audacity for me to lift up mine eyes to such a transcendent creature ; but I have done it, Julian, and it can not be undone. Nor should I wish it to be undone. I would rather sink into instantaneous blessed extinction, having seen such a woman, than lounge through a tedious eternity unilluminated by the radiance of her presence. I am talking rapturous nonsense, of course, and you put me down as an idiot, but it is the kind of idiocy which is a million times wiser than wisdom ; it is the kind of Delphic madness which inspires glorious dithyrambic speech. I feel in this moment what tremendous possibilities of happiness there are in me, what life might be at its highest, if the gods had not been the envious wretches that we know from *Æschylus* that they are. Well, I see your ironical smile. He is in love with some Italian girl, I hear you say. But no, Julian, absurd as the assertion may seem to you, I am not in love with her, nor is she an Italian. ‘The desire of the moth for the star,’ that is not love ; it is something far higher. Its sublime hopelessness dignifies it. Call it worship—sun-worship, fire-worship, if you like ! It excludes even the remotest hint of a hope of possession. But the moth must have a more exalted respect for himself in having aspired so far above his station, in having burned up his gray little life in such a radiant stellar passion. Well, now, dear Julian, do you know the wildly preposterous thought that keeps humming deliriously in my brain ? It is this : You are the man—the only man I know—who can and will win the love of this inconceivably

glorious woman. I don't ask you to come now; for I am not magnanimous enough to wish to witness your triumph. But a deep insight, or instinct, tells me that you will gloriously conquer where I am predestined to suffer a no less glorious defeat. There is no man on earth whom I can imagine seated at her side whose caress would not seem to be a crying incongruity—an outrageous insult. Well, dear Julian, I have exhausted my adjectives, and succeeded in calming myself somewhat by committing my madness to the mail, and putting five green stamps with Umberto's big mustache upon it.

“Do not imagine, old chap, that I have taken leave of my senses. I have only just now discovered them. My sight, my smell, my hearing, have waked up with a dewy morning freshness, and shaken off the Puritanic dust which so long has dulled them; and my poor, disused sense of touch is tingling with exquisite anticipated possibilities which will never be anything else. Yet, Julian, I am wondrously, superlatively alive. But it is a kind of life which is too intense to last long. It would not surprise me if, like Elias, I started, by limited celestial express, in a chariot of fire, for paradise. If you should hear that I have taken unto myself wings, then think kindly of my divine folly, and accept my pictures and *bibelots* as *souvenirs* of

Your friend, GEORGE.”

There was a note in this letter which greatly disturbed Burroughs. The emotion with which every word was charged communicated itself to him, tingling in his very finger-tips. There was an undertone of desperation in it, which vibrated audibly in his

ears. And after this rapturous outburst, not even to mention the girl's name, nor a single circumstance by which she could be identified—that was so like George Crampton that Burroughs had to smile in spite of his sadness. He dropped the letter into his lap and sat pondering. He loved this man as well as he was capable of loving anybody. He seemed endowed with a bright and joyous spirit which made him lovable. Even with his propensity for folly he could sympathize; for Crampton did in his college days the foolish things which Burroughs would have liked to do, but by a sobering Yankee calculation was restrained from doing. What was then more natural than that he should, as far as he was able, have assumed the consequences of his friend's indiscretions!

But now, alas! Julian had follies enough of his own to answer for. He had for two years been in bondage to a woman whom once he had loved, but now despised. And his conscience told him that he was himself the cause of his contempt for her. That she was at heart a low and vulgar coquette, he had but recently discovered; but whether it was not he who had made her so, was the question that tormented him. The bonds which he had lightly assumed were becoming galling to him. They cut into his flesh and caused him pain. And the degradation of it all, the bitterness, the self-contempt, how could he ever rid himself of that? How could he ever hold up his head again? How could he have been so frightfully mistaken in his judgment of a human being? How could he have attributed truth to one so false and flimsy, or nobleness to one so ignoble? And for base reasons to have endured such a relation, after he

had discovered her faithlessness—that was what caused him in retrospect the deepest misery. Now it was at last over; but his retreat, when he reflected upon it, seemed cowardly—devoid of a single redeeming circumstance. He loathed himself for having said the things he had been compelled to say, and for having done the thing he had been compelled to do. It was a question of self-preservation, but that didn't help the matter—didn't make it any less odious. If he had only been a frank and unmitigated brute who could acquit himself of such a scene without wincing, it might have saved him a deal of suffering. But men sometimes do brutal things without being brutes.

All these reflections and many more passed in a shadowy procession through Julian's mind, and echoes of all the cruel words he had uttered flitted through his brain and made it impossible to concentrate his thoughts upon any other subject. He was vaguely disturbed about Crampton's fate, vaguely humbled by his faith in him, vaguely touched by his bequeathing to him the love which had been or would be his own undoing. But if that deluded youth had but known his friend, whom in his loverlike self-abasement he placed so far above himself, he would have shrunk from committing anything that was pure and precious to his keeping. Julian shuddered again, leaned back in his chair, closed his eyes, and tried to think of nothing.

He was just drifting into semi-consciousness, when he was startled by a sharp knock at the door; and before he had time to say, "Come in," an elderly gentleman dressed in black broadcloth entered with a newspaper in his hand.

"Screw up your gas, Jule, and let's have a little light," he said, quietly, as he seated himself, with some difficulty, in a chair on the other side of the table.

He had a shrewd, hard-featured, Uncle Sam kind of a face, adorned with a gray, round-clipped chin-beard. He was broad-shouldered, inclined to stoutness, stooped in his walk, and moved with a caution which suggested rheumatism. And yet there was a certain rude dignity, a consciousness of distinction in the way he carried himself. It would surprise no one to learn, after having observed the Honorable Abiel Burroughs, that he had been sixteen years in Congress and for six years represented his country as minister to a foreign court. Although he was scarcely a gentleman in the strictest sense, (for it is possible to be a minister of the United States without being a gentleman), he had a weighty presence and the air of a man of affairs who had habitually concerned himself with large interests. Hence a certain amplitude of person which was not wholly physical and the impressiveness of his manner.

"Jule," he said, as he leaned over toward his son, regarding him narrowly in the brightened light, "I guess you are in a bad way."

"I am not feeling quite well," replied the son, drearily.

"I guess I won't trouble you with bad news then," the old man continued, folding the paper and cramming it into his pocket.

"Anything about Crampton?"

"Well, I'll be blowed! How did you hit upon that?"

"Is he dead?"

"Yes, there is a telegram from Rome in the 'Commercial,' saying that he died suddenly, last night."

"Does it say that he killed himself?"

"No; what makes you think he did?"

"I had a letter from him to-day. It is the letter of a man who is capable of killing himself."

"Any woman in the case?"

"Yes."

"Hm! That is a bad introduction to the subject I came to talk with you about."

Julian rose suddenly and began to walk up and down upon the floor. Only the strained lines about his eyes and mouth betrayed the pain he felt and the effort it cost him not to yield to it.

He was by half a head taller than his father, to whom, at first sight, he scarcely seemed to bear a trace of resemblance. He was, in the first place, a much handsomer man than the Honorable Abiel could ever have been; and secondly, there was a finish in his manner and an elegance in his bearing which no man of backwoods antecedents could have attained. The ex-minister bore the ineradicable marks of early hardships and a rude rearing, while his son had enjoyed all the advantages which two continents could lavish upon him. And yet to a close observer the type was fundamentally the same, and the son appeared what he really was—an *edition de luxe* of his self-made father.

"Excuse me for a minute, governor," he said, taking an abrupt turn through a half-opened door into an adjoining room.

"All right."

The Honorable Abiel lighted another gas-jet (he could not endure a dim light), and looking up shook

his head with dreary perplexity at the nude "Vérité."

"Well," he murmured, "I've heard that Truth was naked, but, somehow, I never suspected she was as naked as that."

He let his eyes wander about the room, dwelling with the same puzzled frown on the other nudities which the walls displayed, and again he shook his head, with grave disapproval.

"I reckon I've been rather too easy with that boy," he said half audibly to himself, "but he was so darned smart that I couldn't somehow make up my mind to interfere with him as much as I had ought to."

The son here reappeared, arrayed in a dressing-gown of Japanese silk. He had visibly pulled himself together, and was determined to exhibit no weakness. "Will you smoke, governor," he asked putting a silver box of cigars with various compartments on the table. "This, I think, is your weed—Regalia, medium. They are just right."

"No, thanks, Jule," the father replied. "I ain't in a mood for smoking. I haven't bothered you much with interference or advice, I reckon, of late years; but to-night I want to talk to you, Jule—if you'll let me," he added, in a tone almost of deference.

Julian was on the point of answering with an impatient "Fire away," but his father's gentleness disarmed him.

"This affair with Crampton has knocked me up badly," he said, "and I am afraid I sha'n't have the attention to give you that you'll want."

"Never mind. I'll take my chances. It may be a long time before I shall feel like talking again."

The young man carefully selected a cigar after having smelled and rejected several, struck a match, and with long, deliberative puffs, lighted the weed. His father sat looking at him with a slow bewilderment, and apparently forgot what he was going to say.

"Jule," he began, after a long pause, "don't you think it's about time for you to get married?"

The question was so startling that Julian had to turn about and scrutinize the old man's face to ascertain in what spirit he expected to be answered. Half a glance convinced him that there was not a shadow of flippancy in the query.

"I haven't thought of it," he answered, curtly.

"Then it is time you should think of it, Jule; you've passed your thirtieth year, and the longer a man waits after thirty, the harder it gets."

"It is no use talking, governor; I'm already too far past."

"Oh, stuff! you are two months over thirty."

"That's two months too much."

"Don't talk twaddle to me. I say, it is time you should marry."

"I don't know any woman I wish so ill as to make her my wife."

"I have no patience with that sort of talk, Jule. You are a nice-looking fellow; you have plenty of money, or will have; you have education and a fairly good temper. What more can a girl demand?"

There was something here which could not be discussed, and both Julian and his father felt it. They both had that American modesty which makes confidence in that chapter impossible. An awkward silence

fell upon them, until the old man with sudden resolution straightened himself up and said :

" You have been a little wild, Jule. I know that. But that's no reason why you should vow celibacy. We all have much to answer for in that line, when it comes to that."

Julian smoked on nervously for some minutes, and finally, blowing a couple of rings toward the ceiling, remarked :

" You evidently have a candidate, governor. Who is she ?"

" No, I haven't. Any nice, decent girl will do, as far as I am concerned. I ain't hard to suit."

" Have you, perhaps, a suggestion to offer ?"

" Well, since you ask me, there is your cousin Delia Saunders, my sister Jane's daughter. She's a likely girl and thunderin' smart. You know she's coming on a visit here next week."

Julian gave a grunt which was almost a groan.

" No, thanks, governor ; your taste is too catholic," he muttered through a cloud of smoke.

" Well, I ain't particular. I haven't set my heart on Delia. Only one thing is sure, I want you to marry and settle down and be done with all tomfooleries. I want you to step into my shoes, go to Congress and take a hand in the affairs of the nation. You are a darned sight smarter than most of the nincompoops that get into public life nowadays, and there is no reason why you shouldn't make a distinguished career for yourself, as soon as you make up your mind to be done with folly and apply yourself to business."

" And as a preliminary step you want me to marry."

" Precisely."

"But, governor, I'd rather do anything than that, just now."

"Oh, pshaw! It's the simplest thing in the world—for a man with your advantages. As Lincoln said, only be sure you are right, and then go ahead. When I met your mother thirty odd years ago, I was sure I was right, and in three weeks we were married."

"That was in the happy Arcadian days, when the world was younger and more reckless. But, even if you do feel that certainty of being right in your choice, the great danger is that your conviction may be shaken by post-matrimonial developments."

"Well, that's the risk every man has got to take; and he ain't much of a man if he's afraid to take it," cried the Honorable Abiel, slapping the table with his broad, stubby hand. His son, being disinclined to argue the matter further, accepted the implied rebuke, and lapsed into a dreary reverie. The old man sat for a while gazing at his handsome apathetic features with a doubting, anxious expression, and it was plainly to be seen that his thoughts were not cheerful.

"Tell me this, Jule," he began at last, with a huskiness which he vainly strove to get rid of; "if I get you a nomination, will you go to Congress?"

"But how am I to get a nomination, governor, who have not busied myself for an hour with politics, and who haven't an opinion worthy of serious consideration on any public question?"

"Oh, you leave that to me. The Honorable Percy Montford had no more valuable opinions than you have when he first went to Congress, but he has made a first-rate Congressman, and to-day he is a national

character. As for the nomination, you just leave that to me."

"May I ask if you mean to buy it?"

"I mean to get it—that's all."

"For how much?"

"That don't concern you. All I want to know is this—Will you accept?"

Julian got up once more, and began to pace the floor. The old man again watched him anxiously.

"Jule," he said, with great gentleness, "what have you to show for the thirty years you have passed in the world? I don't mean the question harshly; but, if you don't mind, I should like to have you answer it."

"Nothing, governor; worse than nothing."

"And would you be willing to employ the next thirty years, provided they are yours, in the—same line of business?"

"Don't crowd me, governor. Don't use your advantage ungenerously."

"I had no idea I was doing it, Jule. But if you can't answer me to-night, I can wait until to-morrow."

"All right. I'll try to answer you to-morrow."

The Honorable Abiel Burroughs rose with the same caution with which he had sat down, and, taking his son's hand, said:

"Good-night, Jule. I don't mean to brag, but when I was your age I had been district attorney, I had been two years in Congress, and was a member of the Committee of Ways and Means."

"Yes, governor. But there was better stuff in you than there is in me."

"I don't know about that. I hadn't half the book-

learning that you have. I was as poor as a church rat when I started in the law."

"That's just it. You had everything to win, and you won it; I have nothing, because you have won everything for me."

"No, Jule, no. But we won't talk any more about it now. Good-night."

"Good-night, governor."

CHAPTER II.

A MOMENTOUS DECISION.

THE Honorable Abiel Burroughs had made his great fortune in the West, but, like so many of his fellow-millionaires, preferred to spend it in the East. After his return from Europe he had, out of regard for his son, given up his expectation of further political advancement, had built a big, gorgeous house in Fifth Avenue, and had settled down reluctantly to the enjoyment of his riches. He had to school himself before attaining any sort of success in this laborious task; for as he had never previous to his European experience had any leisure, he was at a loss to know how to employ the abundance of it which he now had on his hands. Club life he did not care for, and for reading he had no taste. Personal gossip, unless it related to public men and might affect appointments, wearied him. At the opera he rarely succeeded in keeping awake. In the drama, which he occasionally patronized, he had decided but erratic tastes. Harri-

gan and Hart's performances represented his ideal of light comedy, and he rarely missed their opening nights. But the climax of dramatic excellence he found in a play called "The Old Homestead." He had the courage of his sentiments, and never shrank from avowing them. Of Europe and Europeans he had the most contemptuous opinion, and quoted freely from his court experience to justify his scorn. He had a dozen standing anecdotes which he related with much gusto to his poker club, which met every Thursday evening at his house.

"The king," he said, "he was a nice enough fellow, and not a bit stuck up. He was as easy to talk to as if he had been an American. I didn't always understand what he said, for his English was rather queer; but that made no difference, for he never said anything of any consequence. 'Ow do you do, Meestare Burroughs? I am vary glat to see *you*,' he would say, as he shook my hand. 'I hop you have good news of ze President of ze United Stats.' I naturally replied that the President was very well, and reciprocated his Majesty's kindly feeling. 'I am vary glat, Meestare Burroughs, to hear that ze President is in good healt, and I hop I find you in ze same, Meestare Burroughs.' I thanked him, of course, and told him I was in tip-top condition. Then he grinned at me, told me he was 'vary glat to hear it,' shook my paw, and went to say exactly the same thing, with only the names changed, to somebody else. Presently the crown-prince would come along, all wreathed in smiles and gold lace, and say: 'Ow do you do, Meestare Burroughs? I am vary glat to see *you*. I hop you 'ave good news of ze President of ze United Stats.' I

would go through with the same ceremony once more, whereupon the crown-prince would assure me that he was 'vary glat to hear it,' and slide off to some other plenipotentiary, in whose health and that of his sovereign he would express the same amiable interest. No sooner had he turned his back on me than Prince John, the king's uncle, would come sailing along, grab my hand as if I were his long lost brother, and repeat the same inquiries in French, of which I didn't understand a word; and we would stand bowing and scraping and grinning at each other like two amiable Cheshire cats, I repeating his last word with a question-mark after it, and he repeating my last in the same tone. When I had Jule along with me I got along first-rate, for he could jabber French as good as any prince, but when I was alone, as often happened, I never got beyond 'Ow do you do?' and 'ze healt of ze President of ze United Stats.'"

This anecdote and others of the same kind were popular in the poker club, for Mr. Burroughs was a very good mimic, and related his stories with a burlesque exaggeration which called forth roars of laughter. He enjoyed a good story himself, and enjoyed telling one. But, like most good story-tellers, he was apt to inflict the same anecdote repeatedly on the same audience, relating it every time with undiminished gusto, without a suspicion that it had long since lost its novelty. It was remarked by many that in the presence of his son he was never funny.

That the young man, without any intention on his part, imposed a certain restraint upon him was scarcely to be denied. He had a great respect for Julian in one way, though he was far from approving of his

manner of life. The fact that he spoke French, an accomplishment which Mr. Burroughs professed to regard as unpatriotic and ridiculous, and dressed in a style which seemed at variance with the Constitution, extorted from his sire a reluctant admiration which sometimes bordered upon awe. Julian seemed to belong to a different species, and though it was, abstractly speaking, a ridiculous and un-American species, Julian was, somehow, neither ridiculous nor un-American. He squandered money in the manner of a man who has never known the trouble of making it. He patronized the drama—both the legitimate and the illegitimate—and gave suppers to the sylphs of the ballet. He drew the most startling checks which his governor had to honor, with an admirable *sang froid*, and never so much as apologized for his extravagance. He did a number of other things which he ought not to have done, and left undone a variety of things which he ought to have done; but he preserved through all his misbehavior a certain beautiful dignity and outward propriety which made one inclined to discredit the rumors that circulated about his relations to one of the ten commandments. He was altogether so attractive a personality that every one who knew him found it difficult to believe ill of him; and his father, who was indulgent toward youthful folly, had always been disposed to put the best construction upon his peccadilloes. But he had to draw the line somewhere, and he drew it, perhaps a little arbitrarily, at the end of youth, or that degree of youth to which folly was allowable. He demanded now the definite closing of the first act and the raising of the curtain upon an entirely new scene, at the opening of the second.

Old Mr. Burroughs waited impatiently at luncheon (the day after the interview recorded in the last chapter) for his son's appearance. His widowed sister, Mrs. Whitecomb, who presided over his household, had to bear the brunt of his ill-humor, but she was a large and genial woman, and a little bit obtuse, and could endure a good deal without any ruffling of temper. She was, moreover, so proud of her brother that she felt complimented even at being scolded by him. She was intensely conscious of his wealth, distinction, and national fame, and bragged of him in a guileless way to her acquaintances. Her nephew, who was given to being sarcastic with her, she could not quite make out, but admired him immensely. She spoke of him with bated breath, as of some higher order of creature, whose ways were exalted above her comprehension and criticism. She knew in a vague way his reputation, but it made no difference with her, and in no wise affected her treatment of him. She was in a state of general bewilderment as to metropolitan ways and manners, and had never quite found her footing in this Babylonian confusion. She had had very decided opinions in Indiana; but as, somehow, they did not apply to New York, she had given up the habit of judging. She lacked both the energy and the ability at her age to readjust her mental lens of vision to new conditions, and she floated with her bewildered smile through New York society, without finding lodgment or acquiring any definable place in it. She was the Honorable Abiel Burroughs's sister—that was all. And the Honorable Abiel was, as far as society was concerned, only the father of Julian Burroughs. He was known to exist, but was rarely seen.

His existence was inferred from the house in the Avenue and his son's extravagance. Though he sat occasionally on public platforms and contributed liberally to popular charities, the metropolis was not half as much interested in him as in his son; and ex-minister though he was, the newspapers took far less account of him than of the handsome young man who bore his name, and whose chief distinction consisted in his capacity to spend.

It may have been because the Honorable Abiel felt a little uneasy in his obscurity that he had begun of late to resume his interrupted connection with politics. He saw plainly that there was no political future for a Republican in New York, unless he happened to get a national appointment; and he squirmed a good deal at the thought of severing his connection with a party which had conferred such great honors upon him. He who had known Lincoln and Chase and Seward, and who was a repository of anecdotes concerning those departed chieftains, how could he make common cause with copperheads and Tammany and the rebel brigadiers? Mr. Burroughs, after a great deal of anxious reflection, came to the conclusion that his turning Mugwump was out of the question. But Julian, who had no traditions to trouble him, could scarcely be reproached for choosing his party with a view to his own advantage. He could scarcely be bound by his father's antecedents. The important thing was for him to get to Washington, not by the slow and laborious by-way of Albany, but by the straight road of a congressional nomination. The old gentlemen had, by a shrewd and roundabout manœuvre, obtained the assurance from the leader of Tammany Hall that for

sixty thousand dollars, paid ostensibly for campaign expenses, the nomination was at his disposal. He could see no moral objection to accepting this offer, at the same time as he was personally identified with the Republican organization and lending his respectable name to cloak infamous deals and trades and corruption of voters. Whatever his party did was (if not laudable) at least defensible; and after each election he was ready to put his signature to documents whitewashing the unblushing tricksters who profess to represent the Grand Old Party in the metropolis. No man who cherished a lurking ambition under his waistcoat could afford to be overscrupulous, Burroughs reasoned; and he found even a certain satisfaction in exhibiting a broad, pachydermatous front toward those obnoxious persons who took him to task for his indorsement of rascality. He had after each such attack an agreeable sense of solidarity with his party, and a revived hope of being called to the front in some conspicuous capacity.

When he had waited for his son as long as his dignity permitted, Mr. Burroughs ordered luncheon and seated himself at the upper end of the table with Mrs. Whitcomb *vis-à-vis*. It was a large, handsome apartment in which they were sitting, with extremely elaborate ornamentation of carved oak and stamped-leather hangings, all of a richly subdued tone. There were no pictures, but each panel exhibited an exquisitely carved game-piece, and the open doors to the conservatory revealed a vista of spreading palms, gorgeously blooming cacti, and dancing fountains.

"Maria," said the master of the house, as he noisily tasted his soup, "this soup is too hot. You know I

can't stand having my stomach burned up with these d—— spices."

"You know, Abiel," replied Mrs. Whitcomb, amiably, "that it's no good talking to this new cook. He's so high and mighty that I am afraid of him. He laughs in my face whenever I venture to make a suggestion."

"Kick him out, then. I don't care a rap for his patties and salads and oily abominations."

"But you know Jule cares for them, Abiel."

"Well, what if he does. Is it Jule who runs this house, I should like to know, or is it me?"

Mrs. Whitcomb was not equal to answering this conundrum, but pushed her soup-plate quietly aside and beckoned to the butler.

"I want you to go out, Maria, and kick that Frenchman down-stairs for me this very minute. I won't tolerate such an impudent cuss in my house, and I want you to engage a plain, substantial cook who knows the American style of cookery."

"But, Abiel," remonstrated Mrs. Whitcomb, with imperturbable affability, "aren't you rather unreasonable? How can I kick a man down-stairs, and especially a Frenchman?"

"Oh, these Frenchmen—there's no grit in them—no starch. They collapse like a balloon the moment you prick them. You just get regular hopping mad, Maria, and, you'll see, he'll come to terms. There's no use standing and grinning at him good-naturedly as you do. You must get mad, I tell you, Maria, regular crackling mad."

It was difficult to imagine the bland and suave Mrs. Whitcomb "crackling mad," and she evidently

herself found her brother's proposition puzzling. She was, however, relieved from answering by the entrance of her nephew. Julian took his seat quietly at the table, called for a bottle of claret, and fell to eating; while his father sat with his shaggy brows knitted, gazing intently at him.

"Well, Jule," he said at last, "have you made up your mind about the matter we talked about last night?"

"Yes."

"And what is your decision?"

The old man's voice almost trembled as he asked the question, and there was a tense, strained look in his eyes, which betrayed his agitation.

"I have decided to yield to your wishes," the son replied, putting down his glass of claret and wiping his mustache with his napkin. The Honorable Abiel cleared his throat noisily and blew his nose. Then, with a visible sense of relief, he attacked his beefsteak, which was one of the few things his French *chef* could not spoil for him.

"Jule," he observed after a considerable pause. "I am glad you have taken my advice in this matter. You may have to do some mighty nasty things, though, before you get through with this business; but I hope you are equal to them."

"What do you refer to?" asked Julian, putting down his knife and fork.

"Well, you know, in the first place, you'll have to be a Democrat, and that, you know, is pretty nasty."

"Oh, yes; but scarcely any nastier than being a Republican."

"Good for you, Jule," cried the old man, with a most unexpected laugh. "I like to see you stick up for your party."

"It was rather a mild way of sticking up for it," remarked Julian.

"Well, mild or strong, I like it. But that was not what I had in mind. You have got to go down to the convention next week and make a speech accepting the nomination. You have got to put in something about Jeffersonian simplicity, and you've got to go for the Republicans. Point the finger of scorn at the scandals during Grant's administration—Belknap, Robeson, Babcock, and all the rest of them; haul us over the coals for overtaxation, centralization, favoring monopolies, tendency to Cæsarism, and anything else you can think of. If you like, I'll write the speech for you; for, to be frank, Jule, I should be afraid of your putting your foot in it. You know I am an old hand at that sort of composition. I know to a T just where the applause will come in, and I know just how to tickle an American audience. If they are Democrats, Thomas Jefferson will fetch them every time, and Samuel J. Tilden—be sure you bring in his full name, with a stop for applause after each—and Horatio Seymour and all the other venerable mossbacks. Then, I'll give you another first-rate idea. Find out what kind of flattery will be most agreeable to your audience. If they have no virtues at all, or achievements that you can detect, praise their sense of fair play—which, by the way, they have none of—and, above all, their sturdy American common sense; make them feel in their ignorance their superiority to those preposterous persons who have gone through college or

been abroad or in any way forfeited their birthright as plain American citizens."

"But then I shall be casting discredit upon myself, governor."

"Oh, never mind that. They won't hunt up your record, and if the Republican papers attack you as a college man and an aristocrat, it'll rather strengthen you."

"But, governor, that's a deuced bad business."

A shade of anxiety passed over the Honorable Abiel's face, as he perceived the tone of disgust in his son's voice.

"Why, Jule," he cried, "you have given me your word; and I tell you if you take a hand in this thing, as you've promised, you've got to go the whole hog."

The young man ate for a few minutes in silence, drank another glass of claret, and finally inquired:

"Is there anything else?"

"Then you stand by your promise?"

"I do."

"And you'll allow me to write your speech for you? If there is anything you can't quite go, then you may strike it out."

"I prefer to write it myself."

"Will you let me see it before you deliver it?"

"Yes."

"And remember this. Go for Grant with all your steam; pitch into the Electoral Commission, the fraud of '76, and all the rest of it. But don't say anything about Lincoln, for he's canonized, you know—unless you try to make out that he was really a Democrat."

Mr. Burroughs laughed uproariously at this joke, and Mrs. Whitcomb smiled feebly; but Julian remained

unresponsive. Whether it was the responsibility of his new career which impressed him or his mere disinclination to leave the old, it was evident that he was far from happy. His father suspected that there was something under it all, but Jule was such a curious, taciturn, and self-sufficient creature that he would have been afraid to sue for his confidence.

CHAPTER III.

THE BEAUTIFUL HEATHEN.

As Julian and his father were about to rise from the luncheon-table, a noiseless servant entered and announced Miss Cordelia Saunders. The lady in question, however, made this ceremony superfluous, for she followed close on the heels of her announcer, drowning his respectful voice by the demonstrativeness of her greeting.

"Why, how are you, Aunt Maria," she cried, embracing and kissing the bewildered Mrs. Whitcomb; "and you, Uncle Abiel, I hardly suppose you recognize me, do you? And Cousin Jule, he'll repudiate me up and down; I know that from his looks and reputation."

She shook hands with each person as she addressed him and beamed a frank, girlish smile with a kind of knock-down directness straight into his face. She was a tall, handsome girl, and remarkably well made; but there was something *prononcé*, almost overwhelming in her manner, and her voice, though agreeable

in quality, was a trifle loud, and her articulation slovenly. Her brisk and rather masculine stride made Julian shrink back as she approached him; and he noted, not with unmixed approval, the unabashed stare in her light-blue eyes and the free and easy manner in which she moved her attractive blonde head. He could scarcely be mistaken in detecting an air of defiance in the erectness of her bearing. She impressed him as a personification of the Declaration of Independence. Even the loose lock of crimped hair which had escaped from its confinement and curled about her ear seemed bent upon asserting its freedom. She wore a brown spring ulster, buttoned with enormous bronze buttons, representing owls' heads, and a rakish-looking soft hat, set askew, trimmed with an audacious bunch of feathers. In her hand she carried a dainty umbrella which she swung like a walking-stick.

Such was the startling phenomenon which obtruded itself upon Julian's vision. This was the long-expected Indiana cousin whom his father had proposed as the companion of his life. He put a very emphatic veto on the latter proposition once more, but resolved, with a conscientious effort, to make himself as agreeable to the young lady as his temperament and circumstances would permit. It was eight years since he had seen Delia Saunders, and he had a recollection of her as an awkward, long-limbed, half-grown girl, resembling a half-fledged fowl which is constantly cackling and scratching and kicking up dust without the least provocation. He conceded now that she had undergone a not unpleasant transformation, as far as her exterior was concerned, but the bristling energy and self-asser-

tion were still obnoxiously prominent; and something glaring, undisguised, and unsubdued in her voice and demeanor lessened, to his mind, even the attractiveness of her beauty. She had by her demonstrative greeting deprived him, as it were, of his character of host, and almost embarrassed him, and, what was worse, she was apparently aware that she was shocking him, and found amusement in it.

“Well, Cousin Jule,” she continued, as she divested herself of her wraps and at Mrs. Whitcomb’s invitation took her seat at the table, “what a howling swell you have grown, to be sure. Do you remember the time you pulled my hair because I told Uncle Abiel that you smoked? Now, don’t say that you’d like to do it again. I am not so manageable now, Cousin Jule, as I was then.”

“If my memory is not at fault, you were far from being manageable at the time to which you refer,” Julian replied, with a lofty little smile of politeness; “I believe you generally got the better of me in our past encounters.”

“Ah, you remember that? Well, I am glad you do; for I am bound to get the better of you again, Cousin Jule. I assure you, I am an awful girl, positively awful. I always have my own way, don’t I, Aunt Maria?”

Mrs. Whitcomb, who was dumfounded at the glib audacity of her speech, nodded vaguely, and wondered how long the Grand Mogul would tolerate such unceremonious treatment. She looked anxiously at him, but could detect no sign either of pleasure or displeasure. His face expressed only the conventional animation which politeness prescribes. He stood with his

back to the empty fire-place, bending his smiling gaze upon the vivacious young lady, and giving the most flattering attention to her conversation.

"I hope we shall not come in conflict," he said, in response to her last remark. "If such a misfortune were to happen, I fear you would get the better of me again, as you say. I should ignominiously surrender."

"Now, Cousin Jule," cried Miss Delia, with a good-humored laugh, "you don't think I am bright enough to see that you are making fun of me; but you just wait until I have rested from the journey and got my wits in repair, and I'll pay you back for that."

"I hope you'll have pity on my defenseless state," he answered, stroking his peaked beard. "In tilts of wit I am always at a disadvantage, particularly with ladies."

"Oh, you are a sly one, you are!" Miss Delia exclaimed, sending him a gay, challenging glance; "I have got to have it out with you, sooner or later."

"Later—by all means, let it be later!" he ejaculated, in mock alarm.

She laughed again with real amusement, and began to rummage with both her hands in her hair. Something or other was wrong, it appeared; and quite *sans cérémonie* she pulled out two or three hair-pins and put them in again, looking all the while at Julian with smiling defiance.

"I wish you'd let me take your son in hand and discipline him a little, Uncle Abiel," she said, turning her bright, saucy face to the old gentleman; "he's sadly in need of training."

"Well, you'll have a job on your hands—that's all I can say," the ex-minister replied.

"I am equal to it, uncle. I'd put him through his paces, I tell you. You know I'm a famous man-tamer. Oh, at Oberlin I had such fun! I could make the fellows do just as I liked. I only cracked my whip, and they all danced."

"I thought dancing was forbidden at Oberlin," Mrs. Whitcomb observed, timidly.

"Not dancing to the music of a whip—that is not forbidden."

When Miss Saunders had finished her luncheon, Mrs. Whitcomb summoned a maid, who gathered the lady's wraps together and conducted her to a beautiful apartment, upholstered in pink, on the third floor. The tables and chairs were of graceful and dainty shapes, and enameled in white and gold. From the windows there was a fine view of the park, with a smoky, autumnal vista up toward Harlem and North River. The Fifth Avenue stages which rumbled over the pavement below, the elevated-railroad structure, with trains rushing in different directions, which was visible beyond the trees of the park, and the hoarse shrieks of the ferry-boats which now and then came floating through the air, gave the young girl a delightful metropolitan impression. She sat down at the window and surrendered herself to the pleasure of new sights and sounds. She had never been in New York before, but she had been warned by her father, who was a prosperous Indiana lawyer, not to betray her astonishment at anything she saw. He had told her "to stick up for Indiana," which was a superfluous admonition, and not to "act green." She was not prone to take advice, as a rule, having a firm faith in her ability to acquit herself creditably by her native clev-

erness in all relations of life ; but she had in the present case promised her parent to heed his parting injunctions. She was an only daughter, having a brother many years her senior, and had been petted and spoiled from her earliest years. But, in spite of all that she did to arouse people's displeasure, it was impossible to dislike her. There was something frank and wholesome and good-humored in her wildest freaks, and her defiance was half lack of training and half a consciousness of strength which she did not know what to do with. It was contrary to her father's advice that she had gone to Oberlin College, studied Greek, got religion, engaged herself, broken her engagement, become a temperance lecturer, and written articles for "The Woman's Journal." He consoled himself, in the end, with the reflection that there was no harm in any of these enterprises, and concluded, after much futile remonstrance, that his daughter would have to live her own life and shape her own destiny. Delia, who had been clamoring for this very right, was perfectly content with his conclusion, and resolved, in a crude, youthful way, to make the most of her freedom, and, without reference to public prejudice, carve out a career for herself which should put her critics to shame. Having committed the mistake of being born a girl, she would do her utmost to rectify it. The world, and particularly the masculine part of it, had entered into an ignoble conspiracy to keep women in subjection, to deprive them of their human rights, and make them serve where they had been equipped for command. It was a very shrewd thing, she conceded, on the part of the men, for women were naturally so much cleverer than their tyrants—had

more wit, *finesse*, and a finer quality of brain—that the latter had to fall back upon mere brute force to establish their monstrous supremacy. Delia meant to spend her life in the effort to reverse this unnatural order of things. It was for this reason she had procured a classical education, studied higher mathematics, and gone on the lecture-platform. She had had a fair success in this capacity, not because of what she had to say—which was audacious rather than original—but because of her good looks. It was a novel thing to see a beautiful young girl of twenty-two, in mannish attire, stand up and with the most charming defiance haul the men over the coals for their injustice to women. It was a sort of lark; and though Delia saw that she was not taken seriously, she determined to persevere until she should compel the world to listen to her. She was very little disturbed by the press notices, which went into rapturous descriptions of her appearance and ignored what she said, or summed it up in a paragraph of half a dozen lines. She collected them scrupulously, and, much as she tried to conceal the fact from herself, she rather liked them. She grew bolder and bolder in her arraignment of modern civilization, and soon came into conflict with the clergy, who quoted the Bible to prove her an Antichrist and a subverter of the faith. Nothing could have pleased Delia more than such a conspicuous *rôle*. She took up the gauntlet bravely, and made her contemptuous adjectives buzz about the ears of the shocked parsons. The Bible, she now discovered, was responsible for the degradation of women. The first step toward the emancipation of her sex must be the abolition of the Christian religion. The newspapers now dubbed her “the Beautiful Hea-

then"—a name which she boldly accepted, and used as a sub-title in her advertisements. She grew more and more reckless in her attacks upon the Bible, or, as one of her admirers put it, she "appreciated the humorous side of the Biblical myths, and gave those polygamous old patriarchs fits." Another worshiper, who had vainly placed his hand and heart at her disposal, called her a "Herbert Spencer done in soprano," another apostrophized her as "Ingersoll in petticoats." Some burned incense to her in verse, and nourished her vanity by extravagant adulation. She came to believe gradually that she was doing a work of tremendous importance to mankind; that like a nineteenth century Luther she was breaking the shackles of superstition, and delivering the human soul from the bondage of the dark ages. She accepted everything that was new with avidity; devoured Darwin, Spencer, Tyndall, Huxley, Feuerbach, La Salle, Fourier, and Marx, and reproduced their arguments in an airy and rather flippant way, properly seasoned with jokes and witticisms of her own invention. And yet, with all her irreverence and hunger for notoriety, there was really no harm in her. So far from being any of the tremendous characters in which she half unconsciously posed, she was only a vain, headstrong, but, on the whole, kind-hearted girl; clever, audacious, untrained, and gifted with a certain dramatic *verve* which made her enter enthusiastically into any *rôle* that seemed impressive.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FINGER OF FATE.

Two days after her arrival in the city, Miss Saunders surprised her cousin by asking his advice in the choice of an artist to paint her portrait. A Western admirer, it appeared—a rich widower in St. Louis—had declared his willingness to pay a liberal sum for the privilege of possessing her painted counterfeit; and she had promised him, on her arrival in New York, to be mindful of his prayer. Julian, who had a large acquaintance among artists, and knew exactly what each one could do, recommended his friend George Talbot, of whose skill as a portrait painter he expressed the highest opinion. He may also have been influenced by the consideration that Talbot, as he knew, was studiously accumulating funds for a Roman pilgrimage, and this Western contribution, he reasoned, would probably be very welcome.

It was with the best grace at his command that he offered to accompany his fair cousin to Mr. Talbot's studio; and, after a critical inspection of her toilet, offered her a seat in his carriage. He did not approve of her hat, which was too unconventional, but he did not feel at liberty as yet to offer suggestions. But he could not very well, on account of her hat, refuse to appear with her in public. She talked with an animation which was almost embarrassing, as they drove down the avenue, and seemed wholly unconscious both of his discomfort and the attention which she attracted. Nevertheless, he resisted the temptation to

request the coachman to turn into Madison Avenue. The venerable yellow stages which in those days went bumping and lurching through the crowd of handsome equipages particularly interested Delia. They reminded her of Indiana, she declared. She was not in the least vexed at Julian's unresponsiveness, but talked at him with unfailing good-humor about everything she saw and heard. Every now and then a stray lock of her blonde hair escaped from its confinement, and when she tucked it in he noticed afresh her small, dimpled hand and the pretty outline of her face, and thought it a pity that she had not had a better bringing up; for it was to the misuse of an untrammelled freedom, which is always a bad thing for girls, that he attributed her unconventional demeanor.

The carriage stopped outside of the Tenth Street Studio Building, where Talbot occupied two rooms on the top floor. He opened the door himself, holding his palette and brushes in his left hand, and with a cordial greeting ushered his visitors into the studio. He was a young man of about twenty-five, slender of growth, and undeniably handsome. He was as blonde as a canary bird, and as daintily made. His fine pale-yellow hair was parted in the middle, and, as it were, evaporated in a kind of fluffy cloud about his ears. When he walked it waved to the rhythm of his step. He had a mustache, too, of a little deeper yellow than his hair, and a fresh, rather girlish complexion. His face expressed gentleness and delicacy of sentiment. His features, though not remarkable in themselves, showed that he had been tenderly reared. Their neutrality was, however, relieved by a pair of large blue, introspective eyes, with a warm, luminous depth in

them. They were mild, like the personality which they illustrated, but they were unusually ardent, full of fine possibilities. In his attire the young man revealed an eye for effect which departed slightly from the conventional standard. But the extravagant knot of his scarlet necktie, his black velvet jacket, and light trousers, considerably wider than fashion prescribed, were permissible enough in an artist, to whom Custom grants—in dress, as in morals—a limited exemption from her authority.

Delia, to whom this species of man was a novel phenomenon, took him in with a great frank gaze which somewhat disconcerted him. He pulled forward two big chairs draped with Syrian rugs, and begged his visitors to be seated.

"You came just in time to save this picture from demolition," he said, turning to the young lady.

"And what has the poor picture been doing?" inquired Delia.

"Oh! I was getting furious at it," the artist replied.

"You don't look to me as if your—as if you could ever get furious," she rejoined, smiling.

"As if your fury could be very dangerous" was what she had intended to say; but a look from her cousin made her realize the impropriety of such candor.

"Oh, you don't know me," he ejaculated, with a laugh. "Nature thought it was a good joke to give a man as fiery as gunpowder the face of an Easter lily—to clothe a gigantic soul in the guise of a pygmy. She thought it would make an interesting situation, or a series of interesting situations. I assure you, I

feel gigantic. But it is no good. There's nobody, except Burroughs there, who is willing to take me at my own estimate."

He laughed again, and blushed like a girl.

"You must pardon me for being so autobiographical, Miss Saunders," he said, "but you brought it upon yourself by questioning my Olympic fury."

"But what is the matter with the picture, that's what I should like to know?" asked Julian, who had been regarding the portrait with deep interest. "If this woman is so beautiful as you have made her, I should give a good deal to see the original."

"That's just it. She's far more beautiful. Though I have never seen her, I am head over ears in love with her. The portrait has been ordered by a well-known banker in the city, who, I take it, is in the same predicament as I am. But he has had the advantage of seeing her, and, I fancy, of being refused by her. This cabinet photograph is all I have to paint from, and you can see exactly where it fails to render the exquisite personality. It is just good enough to be tantalizing, and poor enough to make one tear his hair."

"And who is the lady?"

"That's more than I can tell you. But, as you'll observe, the photograph is taken in Rome."

"In Rome? So it is!"

Julian took the photograph, and began to examine it with renewed interest. It was the face of a woman of twenty four or five, and surpassingly lovely. There was a gentle radiance, a noble serenity and repose in the expression, which hinted at a beautiful character. The carriage, and particularly the grand pose of the

head, indicated a woman above the average size, and one accustomed to homage. A *petite* person could never have attained such a superb tranquillity and ease; and, moreover, Nature does not put such a head upon any one who does not tend toward Junonian proportions.

"Did you ever know Crampton?" Burroughs inquired after a pause, transferring his scrutiny from the photograph to the painted picture.

"Oh, yes, I knew him well. They say he shot himself, poor fellow!"

"I inferred as much. Did you ever hear any of the particulars?"

"No. I only heard there was a woman in the case; but *ça va sans dire*."

"You never heard who the woman was?"

"It never occurred to me to inquire. Crampton was rather an odd stick, you know, and very apt to get off his base."

Burroughs made no response to this, but fell again to studying the picture, while Talbot exhibited to Delia his treasures in *bric-à-brac* and some of his ambitious canvases.

"You know," he observed, with youthful egoism, as he placed an unframed composition on an easel, "I belong distinctly to the modern school."

"Good for you!" exclaimed Delia; "that is exactly where I belong, too. No musty superstition or tradition or imposition for me, thank you!"

Talbot was a trifle startled by this unexpected in-dorsement, and observed, gently:

"Oh, I beg your pardon. I didn't know you were a professional."

"Oh, yes, indeed, I am," Delia declared, with a grand sweep of her hand—"not in your line, exactly, but in another, and, I may say, far grander one!"

"There is nothing grander than art, madam," retorted Talbot, warmly.

"Well, that's a matter of taste. What do you say to religion?"

"Ah! then you are a preacher—a woman preacher?"

"You may call me so, if you like. I am a lecturer on religious, or, as some assert, irreligious subjects."

"That is very interesting—very interesting, indeed! And, from a religious point of view, what do you think of that creed of mine which you see before you?"

"Creed! Do you call that a creed?"

"Well, what else would you call it?"

"Two oxen plowing and a man with a skin patch on the seat of his pantaloons. How can you make a creed out of that?"

"I'll call it a declaration of faith, if you like that better."

"No, I don't like it a bit better," ejaculated the irrepressible Delia.

"Well, in this picture I have announced glaringly what I regard as the true principles of art. It is a piece of earth faithfully handled. There is nothing more that that piece of earth can yield than it has there yielded to me. There is life as it is—not as it ought to be or as we would like it to be. That fellow there is a clod of earth like that which he plows, only a trifle further up in the scale of evolution. The

oxen, 'the heavily lumbering oxen,' as Homer calls them, stand half-way between. Do you notice the fellow's slouchy gait? What does that tell you?"

"That he has got up sooner than he liked to."

"Exactly. And the patch on his trousers?"

"The patch? Well, that seems to indicate that he is unmarried, for nobody except himself could have made those stitches."

"And the whole barren, contracted life of the man, with its grim toil from morning till night—the dreary routine of eating, sleeping, and working; the dimly groping brute soul, with no outlook beyond victuals, the instinct of mating, and petty economies—can you see that, or do I only imagine that I have succeeded in expressing it?"

"But, if you meant to tell all that, why didn't you show the man's face? It would be a wonder if his rear view could be so eloquent or—what did you call it?—autobiographical."

"But, don't you see, it was the difficulty that fascinated me. If I had presented him *en face*, it would have been no great achievement. A face is always an epitomized biography; but an autobiographical back—that is a very much harder subject."

"Well, I should say so! You know I came here to ask you to paint my portrait, and by that I meant my face; but now I am half inclined to ask you to paint my back instead. Do you think you could make it autobiographical?"

She looked at him with a quizzical smile, which he was disposed to resent; but an order was an order, and he could not afford to quarrel with a customer.

"I shall be happy to paint you in any attitude you

prefer," he said, with cool conventionality. All the animation had gone out of his face.

It began to dawn upon Delia that he was displeased. "Well," she said, "I want you to paint me addressing an audience—something in this style."

She struck a rhetorical attitude, with one arm akimbo and the other extended, as if in passionate remonstrance. Talbot, thinking she was still joking, burst out laughing, and assumed a still more extravagant attitude.

"Yes," he cried, forgetting his pique in his amusement; "or something like this."

He flung both hands toward the ceiling and frowned like a thunder-cloud. Julian, being aroused from his meditation, suspected that they were getting into trouble, and hastened to interfere.

"Do you think, Talbot, that there would be any impropriety in your painting two portraits of this lady, and letting me have one?"

The painter stood for a moment irresolute; he was sorely tempted to accept the offer.

"I fear," he said, hesitatingly, "that it is against the ethics of the profession. I would rather not do it."

"But can't you make it some sort of fancy picture, and merely retain the features? Call it Hebe or Nansicaa or Andromeda or something in that line."

"I am afraid even that wouldn't be quite honest."

"Not honest?" cried Delia. "Why, I can't see for the life of me why any woman should object to that."

"Perhaps not; but she ought, at least, to be consulted; and I am sure that if I knew this lady and could consult her she would say no."

"You are right, she would say no," Julian assented, after a pause, "and you are right in refusing; but, since you are going to Rome, will you promise this: If you should ever meet this lady, or get the clew to her identity, will you let me know, without delay, who she is?"

"With pleasure."

"Then it is a promise?"

The painter reached out his hand, which his visitor shook with emphasis.

"So radiant a phenomenon could not escape my observation," Talbot exclaimed. "I'll be your Esau, or Ebenezer, or whatever his name was, and report to you what kind of a Laban is her father, and by what sheep she is attended. I'll meet her at the well at eventide, and take a drink with her of the pure waters of inspiration."

"I won't ask so much of you as all that," Burroughs replied, with a laugh which sounded a little forced. His friend's pleasantry grated on him; but he could not afford to offend him.

Appointments were made for Miss Delia's sittings; the price was discussed and agreed upon; and some winged platitudes were exchanged about the weather, the theatres, and the comparative merits of the East and the West. Thereupon Burroughs took his leave, ushering his vivacious cousin into the elevator.

CHAPTER V.

A POLITICAL EPISODE.

THE Democratic Convention which nominated Julian Burroughs for Congress came near ending in a row. There was apparently not a soul outside of the initiated few who had expected such a nomination. Mr. Danforth, the present member, was a candidate for renomination, and he had hosts of friends in the convention who felt outraged at the unceremonious shelving of one to whom they were indebted for so many favors. It was whispered that he had offended the "Boss" by an attempted show of independence, and that the latter dignitary had sworn to take his scalp. And now all the positions he had procured for his henchmen in the custom-house, the departments, and the internal-revenue service—all his efforts in behalf of Pats and Mikes and Barnyes and their friends—counted for nothing, and his persistent silent vote for every job that had the possibility of patronage in it could not save him from political extinction. Having an inkling of what was coming, he had, as a mere forlorn hope, packed the galleries of the hall and the stairs without with his adherents, who were merely waiting for his signal to make a disturbance. They would cheerfully have mobbed the new nominee, if they had known his name or his appearance, for a new man meant to many of them loss of place, salary, and influence. The little distinction which a gaugership or a clerkship, or even a janitorship conferred, was to them a precious thing. It made them among their humble

compatriots a kind of public characters, and entitled them to carry their heads high. What wonder that they were burning with animosity toward the unknown man who was to displace their patron !

It was a great, barren, white-washed hall in East Seventeenth Street where the convention was held. The Boss, a thick-set, square-jawed man, with a pugnacious mouth and a grisly beard, sat, cool as a sphinx, on the platform, surrounded by his braves, some of whom seemed to be enjoying the situation. They were of the most diverse appearance and position. Many were liquor-dealers, dive-keepers, and prize-fighters, with heavy jaws, large cheek-bones, and ugly mouths ; while some were lawyers and business men with intelligent faces and gentlemanly bearing, whose ambition had led them into an alliance with this notorious organization. They subordinated themselves without scruple to the stout, brutal-looking Irishman who held mayoralties, judgeships, fat receiverships, shrievalties, and sometimes even a governorship in the hollow of his hand. They devoted themselves in private and public to singing his praises, found all sorts of occult virtues in his character, lauded him to the skies for not stealing (oblivious of the estimate which such praise implied), and threw a thin mask of respectability over his whole degrading activity. And for this subserviency they would sooner or later reap their reward.

Julian, who had, much against his will, at the advice of his father, been elected a delegate to the convention, elbowed his way with difficulty through the crowd on the stairs, which freely commented on his appearance. Some one, by way of pleasantry, knocked

his hat down over his ears, while others exhorted him to "wipe his chin" and "pull down his vest"—all of which he bore with the good-humor of a candidate, though he was inwardly boiling. He heard himself described as a dude, a swell, a fancy chap, etc., and he got several vicious punches in his ribs, indicative of the sentiments that were entertained toward his species. He succeeded, however, in rescuing himself out of the throng without broken bones, and presently took his seat unobserved near one of the windows.

It was a good while before the meeting was called to order. Laughing and subdued conversation were heard from all parts of the hall. The smell of bad cigars made the atmosphere oppressive, and a cloud of blue smoke hung under the gas-fixtures and slowly rose toward the ceiling. It was understood that a committee were having a conference in another part of the building with representatives of the other Democratic organization of the city, with a view to avoiding contests and an equitable division of the spoils. From time to time a messenger arrived and presented a slip of paper to the Boss, who scrawled something on the back of it, and without a change of mien on his stolid face, handed it back. Julian had, from where he sat, a good view of him, and he could not help admiring the consciousness of power which his slow movements revealed. There was a kind of leonine laziness about him which was quite becoming. But the way he sat in his chair, broad, square, and tranquilly defiant, seemed even more suggestive. That must have been the way Caracalla sat; and the same low brow and strong neck that descended in two parallel lines from the root of the ears were a survival from that

ancient type of imperial boss. If our republic is ever destined to suffer shipwreck, this is the kind of man that will wreck it. This is the kind of ruler which universal suffrage, in a community where a majority of the electorate are ignorant, will invariably produce. He represents the true average, morally and intellectually, of the vote that upholds his power. And as soon as he shall represent, not the municipal, but the national average, we shall have him in the White House. If we permit ignorant hordes of foreigners, at the rate of half a million a year, to continue to lower this average, it is an inevitable result which no power in heaven or on earth can prevent.

After half an hour's suspense and the exchange of many messages, five men filed into the hall, and were received with shouts and applause. They took their seats on the platform, shook hands with the Boss, and communicated to him the results of their conference. He listened with an impassive mien, except once when he drew down his mouth into a smile resembling that of a bull terrier. He nodded several times slowly, and spoke between his teeth, with scarcely a perceptible motion of the lips. Presently Mr. Hurst, a prominent political lawyer whom Julian knew, stepped up; and seeing that he was recognized, Burroughs nodded to him across the hall. The Boss directed his sullen stare in the same direction, and the unwilling candidate felt an unpleasant uneasiness steal over him. He felt that he was not making a favorable impression. He was being judged and found wanting. There was something inexpressibly contemptuous in the way the mighty man slowly withdrew his gaze. "Is that dudish-looking chap old Burroughs's son?" he asked the lawyer.

"Yes, that is he."

People were usually noncommittal when talking with the Boss until they had ascertained his opinion.

"H'm! He ain't much to look at. But," after another glance at Julian, "he'll do."

"Yes, exactly. That's just what I think. He'll no doubt do," Hurst eagerly assented.

"I like the old man's looks better."

"So do I. The old Mr. Burroughs is, so to speak, a personage. He looks like a man of weight."

The autocrat of the metropolis pulled, with much deliberation, a roll of tobacco from his pocket and bit off a quid. He had strong, short, regular teeth that looked as if they might chew up a nail with a relish.

"Go over and sit by him," he continued, when he had got the quid comfortably disposed, "and see that he don't make an ass of himself."

"Certainly, with much pleasure. Is there anything in particular?"

"Yes, don't let him make a speech when he gets the nomination. Them green chaps always slops over."

"All right, sir. I'll do my best to shut him up."

The Boss waved his hand in dismissal, and the lawyer bowed and withdrew. A manner which he would have resented in one of his peers he accepted from this coarse, burly Irishman, and felt rather honored at having displayed to the crowd his intimacy with so mighty a personage. He made his way between chairs and benches to Julian, shook him cordially by the hand, lighted a cigar, and began to chat, giving his advice in an off-hand, half-jocose manner. The convention was now called to order, and the roll-call was about to begin, when the Boss rose, stepped

to the edge of the platform, and said in a grouty, stertorous voice :

“The police will please clear the lobbies.”

Never were the behests of a sovereign executed with greater promptness. The formidable blue-coats, armed with night-clubs, rose, as it appeared, out of the very ground, moved toward the doors, and precipitated the rebellious clients of Mr. Danforth down the stairs into the outer darkness. Those who resisted were clubbed on the head, canes were broken, tall hats wrecked, coats torn, clay pipes shattered into atoms. For five minutes the pandemonium was such that the roll-call within could scarcely be heard. The delegates, who always applauded their master's methods, laughed and joked and regarded the episode as capital fun.

A chairman was now nominated and unanimously elected, and a great deal of routine business was promptly dispatched. Everything had been carefully prepared beforehand ; the convention did nothing but register the Boss's decrees. Even the seeming dissent of two delegates, who got up and quarreled about a nomination for which each had his candidate, had been prearranged with a view to deceiving the two gentlemen concerned and enabling the convention to compromise on a third person whom the Boss had already designated. It was admirably done, and, as a ruse, was completely successful. When the little farce was at an end and harmony restored, a delegate with a strong brogue got up and nominated the “Honorable” Julian Burroughs for “Mimber of Congress for the ——th Deesthrick.” He indulged in some highly laudatory comments on his candidate, who, he asseverated, had always been the “worrukin’ man’s frind, a frind .

of ould Oireland, and a good ould-fashioned Dimmicrat that niver wint back on his frinds." He made up a touching but wholly fictitious biography for his "honored frind," as he called Julian (though he had never seen him until an hour ago), and finally sat down amid a storm of applause, winking his eye slyly toward the subject of his eulogy, as if to ask if he hadn't done pretty well. At this moment Mr. Hurst, who had been delegated to look after Julian, stepped up on the platform and whispered in the ear of the Boss:

"That young lunatic is determined to make his speech, and nothing I can say will stop him."

The great man smiled again his bull-terrier smile, nodded slowly, and observed that it was "all right. Mr. Hurst need give himself no further uneasiness." While a gentleman in another part of the hall, whom Julian knew slightly, rose to second his nomination with another little eulogy, the Boss beckoned to the chairman of the convention, who instantly inclined his ear toward him. No sooner had the seconder finished his remarks than the purport of these secret instructions was divulged. The chairman rapped his desk with his gavel, and, stepping to the front of the platform, said that, before putting the nomination of Mr. Burroughs to vote, he would ask the honorable gentleman, as a special favor, to take the chair for a moment, as he desired the privilege of adding a few words to the just encomiums already pronounced by his friends the Honorable Patrick Mulligan and the Honorable Spencer McDuff. Julian, who was taken completely by surprise, thought that his ears were deceiving him, or that the chairman, for some reason, wished to make sport of him, or, perhaps, by underhand tactics, de-

feat his nomination ; but when the request was twice repeated, and obviously with the friendliest intention, he saw no way of refusing, and, amid a storm of applause, he made his way to the platform, feeling dazed and dizzy, and inwardly fearful lest, in some way, he might make a fool of himself in this unaccustomed position. The Boss shook hands with him as he presented himself on the platform, and, turning to the audience, said :

“I have the honor to prisent to the convention the Honorable Julian Burroughs, our next congressman for the ——th District.”

Here the applause broke forth anew, while Julian stood bowing and bowing, and finally, with flushed cheeks and burning ears, seated himself in the vacated chair. The late chairman, taking the floor, devoted himself for five minutes to the production of amiable fiction concerning the moral and intellectual merits of “the Honorable Julian Burroughs,” his devotion to the cause of Ireland, and his sterling democratic sentiments. The call for the question was then raised, and the temporary chairman, without clearly perceiving that he was cutting himself off from making his speech of acceptance, was compelled to put his own nomination to vote and declare, amid much laughter, that it appeared to be unanimously carried. He was bound, however, in a few words, to thank the convention for the honor which it had conferred upon him ; but just then the chairman returned and proceeded to the consideration of fresh nominations. It now dawned upon the novice in politics that he had been, in some mysterious way, outwitted, and that his chance of delivering his cherished speech was gone. He was

not at all sure that there had been any design of bringing about this result, but that, nevertheless, it had been accomplished was beyond dispute. It was a most humiliating fact, not only because all his beautiful reform sentiment had been wasted, but because it gave him, for the first time in his life, a sense of insecurity—of not quite knowing his bearings—and a suspicion of hidden pitfalls beneath his unwary feet. Was it possible that the Boss had received an inkling of what his speech contained? There was not a soul who had seen this speech except his father, and he was surely not capable of playing such a dastardly trick. He had, to be sure, rejected all the old gentleman's suggestions, and had laughed at the hollow, spread-eagle phrases which he had insisted upon as indispensable. It was more than likely that his father meant what he said when he prophesied his political ruin from such a speech; and, as he had set his heart upon seeing him in public life, was it not an imaginable possibility that he had made a confidant of the Boss?

Julian was so interested in this speculation that he paid no heed to the further proceedings of the convention, and when, long after midnight, he found himself strolling up Broadway toward Madison Square, he was yet debating the *pros* and *cons*. For no sooner had he apparently settled the question than a new doubt put forth its ugly head and upset all his previous argument. It was a thorny path he was about to tread, and he was not sure but that it would be the part of wisdom to retrace his steps while there was yet time.

CHAPTER VI.

A CONVERSATIONAL ARTIST.

GEORGE TALBOT filled a space in the artistic world of the metropolis all out of proportion to his size. He was the kind of man that either repels or attracts strongly; that makes partisans of his friends and arouses all the hidden malignity in the bosoms of his enemies. There were artists in good standing who pronounced him a crude sensationalist, a mountebank, and a charlatan, and there were others of not inferior standing who spoke of him as the hope of American art, and by all odds the strongest man that wielded a brush on this side of the Atlantic. The smallest sketch from his hand—if only a few pen-scratches on a sheet of paper—had the power to excite an animosity in certain venerable academicians which was in itself a tribute to the young man's importance. For if he was so devoid of talent as they declared him to be, what danger was there then of his debasing American art, and what occasion was there for demolishing him with such heavy artillery? He had his *clacque*, to be sure, who, by their excessive zeal, exposed themselves and him to ridicule. He was suspected, though perhaps unjustly, of having organized this enthusiastic chorus for advertising purposes; for his clever paradoxes, of which he uttered many, had a way of getting into print which could hardly be explained without his collusion. "The Spectator," "The Saunterer," "The Man about Town," and whatever else the chatty paragraphers for the Sunday press may be called, appeared all to be on intimate

terms with Talbot, and commented on his doings and sayings as if he had been a celebrity. They chaffed him good-naturedly on his conceit, as if his harmless aggressiveness had been as much a national property as Grant's cigar or Butler's cockeye. To live thus in the light of publicity has its dangers for a man of twenty-six. And as for Talbot, there was no denying that he took himself more *au grand sérieux* than his performances warranted. He felt his oats, as the phrase is. It was very easy to make fun of him if you were so disposed. But it was no less easy to be fascinated with his youthful exuberance of spirits and his genially fantastic talk. It seemed difficult not to believe in him. He was a personage in his way—a rich and definite individuality, with a distinct physiognomy of his own. It was scarcely credible that he should expect such great things of himself, unless he were conscious of some power within which justified his self-esteem.

Delia Saunders had not made many visits to the studio in Tenth Street before she discovered that George Talbot was an entertaining fellow. She quarreled with him most of the time, to be sure; but she was controversial by nature, and rather liked quarreling, particularly with a man of whom she had the advantage in size, if not in argument. She could never take a small man seriously, she declared, even though he were ever so clever; and she found herself, by some mysterious instinct, giving undue weight even to the stupidities of a big man. She had an unpleasant way of pointing at the portrait with a mahl-stick or any other convenient object while Talbot was painting; and it was of no use that he remonstrated and nearly

jumped out of his skin with excitement. Much against his judgment he had been obliged to exhibit Miss Delia on a platform with a glass of ice-water, as indicative of her temperance principles and her public character. She was represented standing boldly erect, with one hand leaning on the desk, her handsome chin raised, and her unabashed gaze defying a world of masculine prejudice and opposition. It was contrary to all the artist's preconceived notions to put a young girl on canvas in that style; but gradually, as he caught the key-note of Delia's personality, he began to relish her oddities in a purely pictorial way, and to emphasize what, at first, he would have left unexpressed.

It was part of the young lady's social creed that chaperons were survivals of barbarism, and she discarded Mrs. Whitcomb's services, much to that lady's chagrin. She was amply able to take care of herself, she maintained; and Talbot, after one or two sittings, to which she came unattended, quite agreed with her. If, however, she declared, in her serio-comic way, he felt the need of a chaperon for his own protection, she would not object.

"I suppose," she said one morning as she was posing in her attitude of defiance, "that when you get older you will be falling in love and marrying, and all that sort of thing."

"Oh, well," answered Talbot, as he put a skillful little dab on the portrait's nose, "I should hate to die without having tried it."

He was too much absorbed in his work to take in the implied slur, or perhaps he purposely ignored it.

"I know what you'll do when you arrive at years

of discretion, or perhaps even sooner," remarked Delia, delighting in her impertinence.

"Well, let us hear," said the painter, lifting his palette at arm's length to the level of his eye, and scrutinizing the upper half of the lady's face; "I am rather interested, you know."

"I read you like a book," she observed, with irritating superiority.

"Well, I like that," he cried, laughing. "My dear young lady, you see nothing but the binding of that book, and I even doubt if you appreciate that at its worth."

"Yes; half calf, gilt top," said Delia, dryly.

Talbot winced for a moment, and was on the point of flinging palette and brushes against the wall; but it occurred to him, just as he was about to execute his war-dance, that it was foolish to be angry with a girl. And, moreover, the remark seemed, on second thought, sufficiently witty to excuse its rudeness.

"I suppose you think that is very funny," he said, with a forced laugh.

"Well, I don't think it was half bad."

He found something or other to improve in the colors of the background. For five or ten minutes he skipped about, flinging rugs of rich tawny hues across screens and carved chests of oak, pulling the window-shades up and down, and experimenting with bright-colored fans which he held up against Delia's face, rejecting one after another with impatient gestures. When, at last, he returned to his work on the portrait he had expended his superfluous energy and resolved to excuse the behavior of Miss Saunders, whatever she might do or say, on the plea of defective breeding. He

painted for a while in silence, and did, as he flattered himself, some effective work. But silence was torture to Delia. She would rather have been doomed to life imprisonment than to life-long silence.

"Now, be a good boy, Mr. Talbot," she began, coaxingly, "and don't get mad if I am a little saucy. I was made that way, and I can't help it. But I really mean no harm."

"I was made on a somewhat different plan," he answered, painting away for dear life. "I was so made that I can not retaliate when a lady imposes upon my good-nature."

He blushed furiously, and rapidly plied his brushes.

"Well, that's tit for tat," retorted Delia, breaking into an irresistible smile. "Now we are quits, and you have nothing to complain of."

"All right," mumbled Talbot.

"But speaking of marrying," she continued, "you didn't give me a chance to say my say."

"I am afraid of giving you the chance even now."

"Oh no, you needn't. It would be a pity if you should lose the benefit of my advice. I know exactly the kind of woman you'll fall in love with—and marry, if you can."

"You evidently don't prophesy any brilliant success for me in the matrimonial line."

"No, I don't. I see it as clear as day. You will fall in love with the kind of woman that wouldn't even look at you—some grand, gorgeous, pictorial woman—something like the one there," she finished, pointing to the portrait of the Roman lady in whom Julian had, during his last visit, become so deeply absorbed.

"That isn't exactly complimentary," said Talbot, seating himself before the now finished canvas, and gazing at it with kindling interest.

"It wasn't intended to be complimentary," ejaculated the irrepressible damsel; "it was only intended to be true."

"And she thinks you wouldn't look at me," he murmured, addressing the portrait; "but, my dear madam," he cried, with sudden energy, jumping up and flourishing his brushes, "you *shall* look at me—you shall do more than look at me!"

He put his palette on a table, rumbled his yellow hair, and began to pace the floor excitedly.

"You may think, madam," he said, turning to Delia, "that I am a conceited fool; but that matters little to me. I can not expect you to perceive that you are, at this moment, standing face to face with a man of genius. You have undertaken to prophesy my future. I'll risk a counter-prophecy. And ten years hence we'll meet and see who is the better prophet; for then there will be few who will venture to dispute my right to be named in the company of the greatest. I want to put myself on record now, and if I prove to be wrong I shall humble myself in the dust before you—I promise to do whatever you may demand of me, however ignominious. If you prove to be wrong you shall beg my pardon. I may be small of stature; but so is Meissonier, and so was Napoleon. A great spirit has, in this world, often to accommodate itself to narrow quarters. You'll no doubt smile when I tell you that there is not another man in New York who could have painted that portrait of you as well as I have done. Mark my word, madam, the time will come

when your one title to remembrance will be that I painted your portrait, just as the Duchess of Devonshire has been rescued from oblivion by the fact that Gainsborough immortalized her by his genius. Now, that I have unbosomed myself, you are at liberty to make peace or declare war, as it may please you. In either case, I am agreeable. You may take the portrait as it is, and I'll send you another man to finish the drapery. Or, if you prefer, you may give me one or two more sittings; one day's work more will finish it. If I have offended you by my frankness, I hope you'll pardon me. But it was absolutely necessary, if we are to continue our acquaintance, that we should understand each other."

He rumpled his hair again, seized his palette, and, mixing three or four colors with his brush, resumed his labor. Delia was so completely taken aback by his sudden outburst that for once in her life she was at a loss what to answer. She did not dare to joke, because she felt that that would put an end to everything. And to make a serious response to such a wildly extravagant tirade seemed somehow beneath her dignity. Evidently there was something in this little man which she had failed to take into account. She was not at all inclined to break off the acquaintance and then wait ten years before ascertaining whether it was he or she who owed an apology. Perhaps she had been rude; perhaps she had even wounded him by unconsciously giving expression to the rather supercilious estimate she had formed of him.

"Mr. Talbot," she said, after an embarrassing pause, "I have been in the wrong. I'll apologize now; and if at the end of ten years you prove to be the better

prophet, I'll repeat my apology, and perform any act of penance you may impose upon me."

She had begun gravely enough, but passed into a lighter tone as she went on. But he felt yet the note of sincerity in her voice, and a sense of meanness and ignominiousness imbibed his victory. He had been an ass to take her so seriously, and a tenfold ass in allowing his feelings to run away with him. When would he ever learn discretion? He had deserved that she should laugh at him to his face. But he was glad she had not chosen to do this. For in that case there was no knowing of what monumental folly he might have been guilty.

He made a few tentative remarks relating to the picture, but found it difficult to recover the light, conversational tone. It was therefore a relief to both when Julian entered, flushed, weary, and disgusted, and, flinging himself into an easy-chair, began to stroke his glossy, peaked beard. He picked up a bronze paper-cutter, which he unsuccessfully tried to break; he investigated the head of the tiger-skin under his feet, and pronounced it bad; he lighted, with his cousin's permission, a cigar, and let his restless gaze range about the walls and ceiling.

"If you must have something to break," cried Talbot, laughing, "then here's a fan which I don't mind if you demolish."

Julian accepted the fan automatically, looked at it absently, and finally gave vent to what he had on his mind.

"There's one thing I never discovered before," he said, "and that is that culture—nay, the possession of any talent or distinction beyond the average—is a dis-

qualification for public life in a democracy. I don't claim to be overburdened with either culture or talent, but whatever I have of either is a disadvantage to me. My father takes pride in the fact that he had no advantages in early life; that since he was twelve years old he has made his own living. He began his career by sweeping out his uncle's store at six o'clock in the morning; and out of a salary of ten dollars a month he saved one half. At twenty-five he had earned a competence, at thirty he was a capitalist, and a member of Congress, and at fifty a millionaire and a minister plenipotentiary. He takes it for granted that when he who had nothing done for him accomplished so much, I who have had everything done for me ought to accomplish so much the more. He forgets that a democracy resents refinement, resents culture, and exalts only the average man. If I am to succeed in public life, he will have to overthrow the institutions he has helped to build up, and found a monarchy for my benefit. If I ever have a son, I'll train him for the diplomatic service by having him sweep out a country store. That is the most fitting discipline for an American statesman."

"Take care that there are no reporters around when you say that sort of thing," observed Delia, with mock anxiety. "You know there might be one hidden in one of Mr. Talbot's chests, or in the folds of his draperies."

"I don't care if all the reporters in the world hear me," her cousin retorted. "I feel low, degraded, filthy," he continued, after a pause. "I have been doing all the vilest things that a man can do. I have drunk bad beer and worse whisky with my Teutonic and Hiber-

nian constituents; I have sung as a solo in one saloon 'Erin go bragh,' and in another 'Die Wacht am Rhein.' I have flung no end of ten-dollar bills on the counters, treated the crowd, and refused to take change. I have done other base deeds of villainy, at my father's instigation, and if there are any which I have left undone, I shall go and do them to-morrow; for, if I go in for that sort of thing, I have got to go the whole hog, as he elegantly expresses it. I have not only *gone*, but I have *been* a whole hog. Good gracious! I feel as if I never shall be clean again as long as I live. All the perfumes of Arabia could not sweeten my breath after the things I have said and the things I have drunk. Why, in the name of heaven, does our country insist upon debasing a man, dragging him through the filth, forcing him to dishonor himself by surrendering his honest pride or his good name, before it can find any use for him? The governor says he did all these things which I have had to do, and was none the worse for them; and he calls me a milksop and a mollicoddle for making such a fuss about trifles."

He wiped his brow vigorously, and puffed away at his cigar while Delia laughed softly, and glanced at him over her shoulder with amusement.

"I'd give a dollar to hear you sing 'Erin go bragh,'" she said; "and two to see you shake hands with Mrs. Mulligan and inquire with tender interest for the names and health of the ten little dirty Mulligans. That was what father had to do when he ran for mayor, and he was elected purely on the strength of his popularity with the Irish women. The Democratic papers made no end of fun of him for it. But he won, all the same. He discovered, too, in the course

of two weeks, that he had Irish, German, Welsh, and Scandinavian blood in his veins. He provided himself with a fresh set of ancestors every other night when he addressed a meeting of naturalized citizens, and became so hopelessly composite before election day that we scarcely recognized him. We had to disinfect him gradually after election of all the different brogues and alien habits he had contracted. Now, let me tell you, Jule, unless you develop your latent sympathies with the cause of Oireland and adulterate your ancestry, you'll stand no show whatever."

Julian gave a lugubrious laugh, and declared that he would rather be hanged.

"Isn't it curious," Talbot observed, "how democracy repeats itself? The sixth epistle of Horace gives a fair description of the plight of an American candidate, be he a New Yorker or an Indianian. 'Hire yourself a slave,' which is Latin for 'boy,' who can tell you the names, punch you in the left rib, and urge you to stretch out your hands across the counter. This fellow has much 'infloocene' in the Fabian ward, that fellow in the Velian, etc. Add brother or father, or, in English, old man or old chap. The obscure Mikes and Pats and Jakes who can make or mar your political fortunes are perennial phenomena, and will spring up like mushrooms out of the soil of democracy, whether it be Roman or American."

The speaker did not notice that his friend's attention showed signs of wandering, and that his eyes were riveted with a startled enjoyment and wonder upon the portrait of the Roman lady. Delia, however, responded with vivacity to the classical quotation, and kept the discussion going for some minutes. It was

then one o'clock, and the sitting was declared at an end.

"By the way," said Julian, as he rose and knocked the ashes of his cigar into the fire-place, "who did you say was the man who has ordered that portrait?"

Talbot again named one of the most conspicuous capitalists of the city.

"How I wish he were poor, or at least temporarily embarrassed. I have got to have that picture, you know, by fair means or foul, and there's no use in your pretending to any more scruples about it. How much will you take, now, for a duplicate? I am a politician now, you see, and don't stand on ceremony. Let us have your figure, whether it be high or low."

The painter flushed and stared at his visitor as if to question whether he could really be in earnest.

"You don't mean what you say," he murmured.

"Yes, I do."

"Well, no money can buy that picture, or a duplicate of it either."

Burroughs stroked his beard meditatively, then walked to the window and looked out.

"Well, we won't quarrel about it," he said, turning half about. "You are right, of course, and I am wrong. But will you do me another favor?"

"That depends upon what it is."

"I have received here a formidable document from the American Legation in Rome informing me that I am the legal heir of Crampton's collection of *bric-à-brac*, paintings, and *objets de vertu*. Now, will you take charge of these things when you arrive, box them, and ship them to me when I send for them?"

"Certainly. I shall be most pleased to serve you."

"Here is an inventory of the collection. It contains apparently some very choice bits, particularly in bronze and pottery. The collection of ceramics which was Crampton's pet hobby as long as he lived, is, the minister's secretary writes me, one of the finest of its kind in the world."

"I'll have it carefully packed and shipped whenever you may desire it."

"Thanks; it is very kind of you. You'll draw on me for funds, of course, and in no wise put yourself to inconvenience."

"You need have no fear. You may be sure it will cost you enough by the time you get it through the custom-house."

"When are you going?"

"I have taken passage on the *Servia*, which sails a week from to-day."

"Lucky dog! Well, if I don't see you, *bon voyage!*"

CHAPTER VII.

A QUIXOTIC QUEST.

THE first Tuesday succeeding the first Monday in November came and went, and Julian Burroughs found himself on the way—not to Washington, but to Europe. He had, in spite of his heroic consumption of bad liquor, been shamefully betrayed and sold out. The Honorable Abiel Burroughs was, indeed, a shrewd man, but he had found more than his match in his Hibernian fellow-citizen Mr. Pete O'Connor, the dis-

strict leader through whose agency he had disbursed his largess to burial associations, military associations, Jefferson clubs, and many other predatory societies, which, under the guise of some benevolent object, bleed candidates, and with a beautiful impartiality accept bribes from all parties. The number of sham and real charities with which the Honorable Abiel became acquainted during the two weeks between his son's nomination and his defeat at the polls was something amazing. Petitioners, lay and clerical, male and female, sprang up in his path like mushrooms after a rainy night. Nay, people who were comparatively well-to-do, and whom he would never have suspected of mendicancy, called upon him, making shameless requests, and indulging in veiled threats, if he told them to go about their business. If he had ever been troubled with what is called faith in human nature, he would have emerged from this campaign a cynic of the sablest complexion. But the Honorable Abiel was a veteran, and had lost his political innocence long ago, if he ever had had any to lose. What irritated him in this affair was not the baseness of the average voter and his relatives, but his own guilelessness in permitting the Honorable Pete O'Connor to play him false. He obtained abundant proof on the very day of election that the Honorable Pete and his gang were working, not for his son, but for the Republican candidate, whose name was everywhere bunched with those of the United Democracy tickets for the municipal offices. Some of the very men whom he had hired to watch the polls in his son's interest had also been hired by the opposing candidate, and had done effective service for the latter. It was for a while

a mystery to him why they should display such an unreasoning animosity (such sentiments being among the last in which political mercenaries are apt to indulge) against the candidate of their own party; and it was a great eye-opener to him when he found that no such animosity existed. By a so-called deal between the Republican boys and the Democratic authorities of corresponding rank, it had been agreed that a certain number of votes which would naturally have gone to Julian should be transferred to the Republican candidate in exchange for Republican votes for the Tammany mayor and sheriff. It was a bitter humiliation to the veteran Western politician that he had not foreseen such an arrangement, and taken his precautions accordingly. Politics in the West was a comparatively simple game, and pure as the new-fallen snow, compared to the intricate complexity and depth of infamy which had been reached by these shameless tricksters and wire-pullers of the metropolis. The old gentleman was in doubt whether he should retire in virtuous indignation to the West or take a hand in the metropolitan game with a view to becoming an expert.

Julian, though he had never been eager for political honors, was nevertheless disheartened by his defeat. He had yielded to his father's desire in running for Congress not wholly out of regard for the old gentleman, but also because the life he was leading seemed vain and ignoble, and he found it hard to endure its emptiness. He would have been glad to go to Congress, with a view to providing his existence with some tangible contents—a stimulus to effort, a goal for his ambition. He had hitherto sauntered at a leisurely

pace through life, stooped here and there to pick a flower that struck his fancy, and thrown it away when its freshness and perfume were gone. There seemed absolutely nothing further to accomplish in that line—nothing, at least, that was worth the exertion of stooping. And the zest somehow was gone, too. His tongue seemed parched, his feelings half benumbed. Life, to use the expression of Kcats, tasted like brass against his palate. He loathed himself both for that which he had been and that which he had not been.

“Thirty years wasted and worse than wasted,” he murmured, bitterly, to himself, as he sat in his little world of vases, draperies, and *bric-à-brac*, and stared up at the frescoed ceiling. The noiseless lackey Jackson, who in the mean while had sacrificed his incipient mustache, made a bow in front of him, and announced that the young lady, Miss Saunders, had sent him to inquire whether Mr. Burroughs would not descend into the library, as she desired very particularly to speak with him.

“Tell her I am ill,” his master answered. “No, don’t tell her that, or she’ll be up here. Tell her I’m busy—or tell her anything you like.”

The servant bowed again and departed.

“I wish she would go home,” he grumbled; “she is an awful bore.”

He got up, lighted a cigar, and looked out of the window. The Central Park, which lifted its undulating outlines against the horizon, interrupted here and there by some towering monster of a building, had a yellowish-brown, smoky, autumnal air, and the elevated-railroad trains which crawled along their lofty tracks toward Harlem looked in the distance like huge

snakes that had fell designs on that prosaic community. Julian was so deeply absorbed in his disgust with himself and the world in general that he failed to hear a knock at the door twice repeated. He turned about at the sound of a voice behind him, and saw his father, looking a little shabby and apologetic, approach him, rubbing his hands.

"Well, Jule," said the old gentleman, "I didn't know whether you was in, or I shouldn't have intruded so unceremoniouslike. How are you, anyway, Jule?"

"I am in hell, thank you," said Julian, drearily. "Is there anything particular you want to see me about?"

"Well, I can't exactly say as there is," the Honorable Abiel responded, evasively; "but I reckon I might jest as well say it straight out that we got sold—you and me."

"Yes, governor, we got sold," repeated his son, automatically.

"And, as I am about it, I thought I might jest as well ask you whether you have thought of that other proposition of mine?"

"Which one, governor?"

"Well, about getting married?"

"You evidently want me to get sold once more."

"No, Jule, no; I don't want you to get sold again. But, I tell you, Jule, you are in a mighty bad way, if you don't mind my saying so. You have got to get married in self-defense. You have got to find something worth living for."

"May I ask if you yet regard Delia as a promising candidate?"

"Oh, Delia is a good, honest, straightforward girl.

You might go further and fare worse. That sort of slam-bang style of talk of hers needn't frighten anybody. She has got a mighty good, first-class, genooine, patent-excelsior head-piece on her, I tell you; and she'll make something out of the man she marries, no matter how big a noodle he may be."

"And that's the reason you think she'd do for me?"

"Well, no; I didn't mean it exactly that way. But, I tell you, that girl—"

"Restrain your zeal, governor; I assure you it is wasted. Why, I declare, you are getting positively eloquent."

"Well, you see, I am a little of Shakespeare, but not very much of him," quoted the old man, smiling dolefully.

Julian dropped into his easy-chair again, and sat smoking in silence.

"Well, Jule, I ain't particular," began his father, with a dispirited air, "any nice, decent girl will do. Only don't marry one that's too hifalutin."

"Now, my dear governor, I don't want to be unpleasant; but I beg of you, let us drop that subject."

The young man rose again in sheer impatience, thrust his hands into his pockets, and began to pace the floor. And then, by some miraculous process, as a star swims out of a cloud, golden, big, and lustrous, a luminous thought flashed out upon him, and he stood contemplating it with a fascinated gaze. Why should he not dare? That glorious woman with the placid brow and the noble Junonian lips whom Talbot had ineffectually striven to individualize on his canvas, how could he call a world empty which contained so

wondrous a creature? It was a quixotic enterprise, of course, to start out for a distant land in the hope of winning the love of one of whose very name he was ignorant. Who knew but she might even be married? But somehow he had an ineradicable conviction that she was not married. He had also a dim instinct connecting her with Crampton's tragic end. Even Rome could not contain two such women. The "Delphic madness," "the stellar passion" of Crampton could well have been inspired by that face; but hardly by any other. He could understand why a man, having once lifted his eyes to that divine visage, should court "a blessed extinction, rather than lounge through a tedious eternity, unilluminated by the radiance of her presence." And then that strange, oracular prophecy, was it a mere delirious fancy, or was it founded upon a deeper insight? Was it not even conceivable that Crampton, just before dying, had been endowed with the gift of prophecy? There were many instances on record of such mysterious divination. Julian scouted this idea the moment it occurred to him; but in spite of all it left a joyous tumult in his blood and in his nerves a vague tingling of exquisite anticipation. He pulled Crampton's letter out of his pocket and read with an irrepressible inward exultation:

"You are the man, the only man I know, who can and will win the love of this inconceivably glorious woman. I don't ask you to come now, for I am not magnanimous enough to wish to witness your triumph. But a deep insight or instinct tells me that you will gloriously conquer where I am predestined to suffer a no less glorious defeat. There is no man on earth whom I can imagine seated at her side, whose caress

would not seem to be a crying incongruity—an outrageous insult.”

Julian put the letter back into his pocket and resumed his march on the floor. But a great light was kindled within him—a light of resolution, confidence, and courage. His step at once expressed his changed mood. His apathy dropped off him like a garment.

“Governor,” he said, with a new ring in his voice, “I think I’ll take a flying trip to Europe.”

“Why, that’s the very thing Delia was wanting to talk to you about. She has taken an agency for something or other—the ‘anticipation waist,’ I think she called it—and she is going to start for Europe in a couple of days.”

The young man stopped abruptly in his walk and confronted his father.

“Governor,” he said, warningly, “don’t try your tricks on me. If Delia goes, I shall either stay at home or take another steamboat line.”

“I swear to you, Jule, I never put her up to it. I have been trying to make her give it up. But she’s too thunderin’ smart for me; that’s what is the matter with her. She corners me in argument every time. She has met some of those Woman’s Rights cusses, and they have put the notion into her head, that she has got a great mission to perform, in making women dispense with corsets and wear suspenders, and I don’t know whether she don’t want them to wear coats and breeches, too.”

“And you imagine, governor, that I should find her a pleasant traveling companion under such circumstances?”

“Well, even if you didn’t, I think it is your duty

to stand by her. She is my sister's child ; and anyway there is no harm in her. I don't want to take the responsibility of letting her leave my house alone on such an expedition."

It took a whole hour of argument and persuasion to induce Julian to accept his cousin as *compagnon de voyage* ; and it took another hour to make Delia understand that she was to travel under Julian's escort and protection, and not he under hers.

The old man parted reluctantly from both of them, but felt yet a certain sense of relief in having temporarily emancipated himself from his son's supervision. He had more than half resolved to re-enter public life, and meant ere long to make himself felt as a political power, and take a hand in the distribution of official patronage. Julian had always compelled him to appear a little more respectable than he really was. By his aristocratic associations and his formidable propriety of demeanor he had imposed a standard of speech and conduct upon his father which to the latter sometimes became burdensome. Now he could lapse back into his old ways ; meet his poker club without restraint in his own library, play high, swear moderately, and brew a stiff grog of old Scotch for his cronies. He could even joke with the servants—which he never dared to do when Julian was at home—and talk politics with his butler in a truly democratic spirit.

In spite of these prospective advantages, however, the Honorable Abiel Burroughs was sad when he bade his son and niece farewell on the North German Lloyd wharf, in Hoboken. His breast was agitated by many emotions, but all he said, when he shook hands

with Julian, as the last whistle blew, was to impress upon him the necessity of looking after his baggage, as the European system of checking with ridiculous little slips of paper was so much more insecure than the sensible American system.

"And, remember this, Jule," he added, looking at the young man with a pathetically worried look, "don't you pick up a wife over there—unless she be a good American. Don't you bring home any Dutch or French or *Eytalian* girl. You know they don't like our American ways, and they never learn them."

"Don't you worry, uncle," answered Delia, reassuringly, "I'll look after him, and see that no bad French or *Eytalian* girl nabs him."

Julian responded to this parting injunction with a troubled smile; for, knowing his father's mind on this question, he thought his advice a trifle too transparent. But Delia's remark relieved his anxiety; for it showed that they were not in collusion.

The gangway was just being pulled in when the Honorable Abiel skipped across with an alertness all out of proportion to his years. And they saw him, as long as the wharf was in sight, stand and wave his hat, while his straggling gray hair fluttered in the wind.

CHAPTER VIII.

CIRCE'S SUITORS.

It was a little Renaissance *salon*, or rather reception room. Cupids with exaggerated legs danced

along the frieze, pelting each other with roses. The ceiling was a mass of florid and elaborate stucco-work, which inclosed an open space, wherein Apollo disported himself with the Muses. The walls were hung with rich faded tapestries, representing shepherds and shepherdesses in powdered wigs and in all sorts of delightfully frivolous attitudes. Some were leading white lambs by pink ribbons, others were drinking tea under great trees, and others again were making love in the dainty, exquisite, eighteenth century periwig style. There was a quantity of superb Oriental draperies, heavy and luxurious, about the windows and doors, which, from an artistic point of view, were a little out of tune with the walls and the ceiling. But it is inconvenient at times to be in harmony with your walls when they are as exacting as those of the Palazzo Barberini. There was a fine historic atmosphere about the place, an air of faded grandeur re-upholstered, a quaint rococo charm, that hovered like a ghost of ancient perfume through the stately apartment. Apollo with his mythological drapery was such a gay and unprincipled cavalier; and the Muses were so coquettish, so unblushing in their nudity, that they relieved one of all embarrassment in their behalf.

Two men were standing in this exquisite *salon*, each staring with a blank and bored look at the dancing cupids and turning his back resolutely on the other. The one was our friend George Talbot with his fluffy yellow hair, his ardent eyes, and his bright complexion. There was a look of excited expectation in his glance, as he stood there amid the shepherds and shepherdesses, beating his leg with his slender cane, and crumpling his wide-awake in his impatient

clutch. He had, by a series of ingenious inquiries, before leaving New York, learned that the lady he had painted from the Roman photograph was Miss Constance Douglas, and he had succeeded in obtaining a letter of introduction to her from his aunt Mrs. Horace Talbot, who had spent the previous winter in Rome. He had lost no time, of course, after arriving in the Eternal City, in ascertaining the whereabouts of the enchantress, and now here he was in Circe's reception room, tingling in every nerve with blissful anticipation.

The other occupant of the room was a broad-backed, burly-looking man, well up in the forties, with a bald head, silky-brown beard, and a florid complexion. You saw at once that he was an Englishman. For Nature produces nowhere outside of the British Isles such robust physical manhood, such ruddy masculine necks, and such bad manners. Sir Percy Armitage—for that was the British gentleman's name—had not been two minutes in the room before he had managed—without opening his mouth—to give the young American the measure of his contempt for him; and the latter wondered, in a general way, what he had done to arouse the displeasure of the burly gentleman in the loose-fitting Tweed suit. But just as he was puzzling his brain with this unprofitable query, the door to the adjoining room was opened, and a French chambermaid entered, and remarked, with the most delightful courtesy, that mademoiselle would be pleased to see him in a few minutes. The Englishman was obviously also interested in this announcement, for he turned abruptly around and gazed first at the chambermaid and then at his watch. He then

seated himself, with unmistakable signs of impatience, in an easy-chair which creaked under his weight, and began to poke the rug with his walking-stick. He got up twice to leave, but reconsidered his intention and sat down again. Even the American could not, at the end of fifteen minutes, forbear to look at his watch, and run his hand nervously through his hair. He heard in the next room a rich, clear voice singing a Venetian *barcarole*, with a difficult accompaniment, which was rendered with precision and skill. But it struck him that there was a lack of sentiment in the voice, in spite of its superb purity. It was the voice of a sweet but unaroused nature. He could not doubt that it was the voice of Constance Douglas. She was having a lesson, apparently, from some famous master; for every now and then a superb rich tenor broke in upon her voice, repeating the passage she had just rendered, and at the end of the performance bursting into voluble Italian comment. But who was this Constance Douglas, who made British baronets—not to speak of American artists—cool their heels by the half-hour in her anteroom, while she was sitting singing leisurely at her piano? She was, to be sure, closely related to a former President of the United States, and had no end of public men in her family. But, like all her relatives, she had found herself on the wrong side in the war, and had—like thousands of her countrywomen—staked her all on the result. She was no longer an heiress now who could afford to snap her fingers in the face of the world, but had managed to save a trifle from the general wreck—just enough to support gentility, by a good deal of underground economy, in an historic Roman

palazzo. It was scarcely her beauty alone, or the distinction of her family, which gave her the prestige which she enjoyed in the Eternal City. There were other women as beautiful, and of a far more august lineage, who had made abortive attempts to form *salons* in the old French sense; while about this stranger the *salon* formed itself without apparent effort on her part. The political and religious feuds which divide Italian society now, as they did in the days of the Montagues and Capulets, presented no difficulties to her. A Montague bowed with grave politeness to a Capulet, if her eyes rested upon them, and the Capulet returned the bow with elaborate ceremony. *Neri* * and *Buzurri* * rubbed shoulders without visible inconvenience, and diplomats accredited to the Vatican talked amicably with diplomats accredited to the Quirinal, about Zola or the *figurantes* of the opera. All discordant notes melted into harmony in her presence; under the charm of her voice all the wild beasts which prowl about in the heart of man went to sleep, drawing their claws back within their velvet paws. No one pretended to understand the arts by which Constance Douglas accomplished this miracle, though there was a general unanimity among the ladies, outside of her immediate circle, that they were black arts. However that may have been (for colors are, after all, mere individual impressions), a simpler explanation suggests itself. No one could look at her without having his whole vision filled. There was no room for other thoughts or impressions, either friendly or hostile, when she was present. But there, the door

* The papal and the Italian party.

is opened, the tawny *portière* is drawn aside. You may judge for yourself. It is she.

Though Sir Percy and the young American had waited for her for thirty-five minutes, her coming was unexpected. She came into the room like a soft radiance, and in the twinkling of an eye the world was changed. They had both forgotten that they had been angry, and if anybody had told them they would have refused to believe it. She extended her hand to Sir Percy with unaffected cordiality, asked for his health, when he had come to Rome, etc.; then turned with the same gracious friendliness, in which there was yet a shadow of reserve, toward the younger man, and, motioning him to a seat, addressed to him some questions regarding his aunt Mrs. Horace Talbot, in New York, from whom he had brought a letter of introduction. She apologized for having kept them waiting, remarking that Fra Giovanni, the renowned papal tenor, was very difficult to catch, and, moreover, so irascible that she feared he would have flown into a passion, if she had dismissed him before the end of the hour.

"And you are a nephew, as I understand it, of Mrs. Horace Talbot," she went on, making her gracious eyes beam upon the young artist, "and you have come here to Rome to continue your art studies?"

"Yes, exactly; to be sure," stammered the youth, in a sort of happy intoxication. He was so absorbed in the sight of her, so bewildered at her loveliness, that he could not divert energy enough from his vision to pay proper attention to her words.

"And you, Sir Percy," she continued, bending the same calm, softly radiant gaze upon the Englishman,

"I presume you are fresh from the antipodes, as usual. Did you give my regards to the Shah of Persia, as I told you, and did you tell the Maharajah of Punjab that I disapproved of the burning of widows?"

"I did give your—aw—regards to the Shah," said Sir Percy, with a chuckle. "Of course, I knew you were—aw—chaffing; but then, don't you know, I thought it was—aw—good fun, and so I told the Shah about you; and I shouldn't wonder—aw—if he turned up here one of these days and invited you to become—aw—Mrs. Shah. He grew uncommonly enthusiastic."

"Thank you. Tell him I should like it above all things," she rejoined, smiling; "but I should insist upon his putting away all his other wives, and that might cause unpleasantness."

"Yes, perhaps it might, you know," laughed the baronet, taking a large silk handkerchief from his pocket and coughing into it.

"And I hope you got that rare nautilus you went in search of?" she queried, with an air of interest which was bewitching.

"The *Nautilus*—aw—*pompilius*, you mean; but that is not—aw—so very rare. It was a yet unnamed—aw—species which a Dutch—aw—correspondent of mine at Madagascar sent me a drawing of that I—aw went to get. Whether it is a nautilus, strictly speaking, some scholar—aw—will have to decide. I mean to submit it to—aw—Huxley as soon as I get back to London."

"And he will, of course, have the grace to name it after you—*Nautilus Armitagibus*, or something like that. How delighted I shall be to see you immortalized in that way, Sir Percy!"

"*Armitagius*, if you will—aw—pardon the correction," ejaculated the baronet, flushed with enthusiasm. "You are very kind, I am sure—aw—Miss Douglas; and if you will permit me to show you my—aw—treasure before leaving Rome, I shall take it as a special favor."

"Why, of course. I should have been offended if you had left Rome without showing it to me."

"You are so very kind, you know, so very kind," he murmured, rising, and mopping his forehead with his red handkerchief.

"And perhaps you will permit me to introduce to you this young countryman of mine, in order that he may have a chance to share my pleasure. Mr. Talbot, Sir Percy Armitage. Mr. Talbot is an artist, and, as I am told, a very accomplished one. He has a professional interest in all that is beautiful."

The young American, suddenly collecting his scattered senses, jumped up and bowed to the baronet. He had not heard a word of the discussion, and did not know what he was expected to admire. Miss Douglas, perceiving and easily pardoning his abstraction, was, however, prompt to give him the clew.

"A nautilus which it has cost a journey around the world to get is worthy of a place in the Capitoline Museum," she said.

"I should—aw—prefer the British," observed Sir Percy.

"I should be charmed to see it," murmured Talbot, "though, of course, I am nothing of a naturalist."

"Any countryman of—aw—Miss Douglas is—aw—welcome to any pleasure which it is in my—aw—power to bestow," said the Briton, in an excess of gallantry.

"Take care, Sir Percy. You might repent of your hospitality."

"I have no fear, madam."

The gentlemen were both on the watch for an opportunity to take their leave, when Hortense, the piquant chambermaid, appeared with a tray of Japanese lacquer, upon which were two teapots and half a dozen cups of the daintiest Japanese porcelain. She emerged with her tray from the folds of the tawny drapery like an attendant spirit in the "Arabian Nights," who appears, when he is needed, in response to the unspoken wish. It was impossible, of course, to resist tea of such exquisite flavor, such teacups, and, above all, such an invitation, so simply and cordially spoken. The two men seated themselves again, and their hostess took her place at a small table, conversing with that beautiful ease and simplicity which made every word she uttered in a way remarkable, while she poured the water on the fragrant leaves and waited for the result to declare itself. There was an air of the *grande dame* about her which is extremely rare in unmarried women. It comes in its perfection only to happy natures, satisfied with their surroundings and secure in their dignity. It is, therefore, that American women so rarely attain it while at home. And yet, by transplantation, they often develop something closely resembling it. Not the perfect repose, perhaps, and lofty disdain which daughters of a hundred earls can afford to exhibit, but an admirable tact combined with a gentle animation and a gracious suavity of demeanor. It was the combination of these gifts in an exceptional degree which made Constance Douglas the great social success which she was reputed to be in

Rome. She had, moreover, a fine amplitude of person, which never failed to impress. Men, no matter where they hailed from, found themselves (metaphorically speaking) in the dust before her. All who knew her were more or less in love with her, and frankly avowed their worshipful homage.

As she sat there at the tea-table, with her noble arms moving among the dainty cups, you perceived that she was no longer in the first flush of youth. That she was past twenty-five you would have guessed from her speech and manner rather than from her complexion, which was fresh and delicate. But a certain experience is implied in a grand air and a noble bearing. Constance Douglas had gone abroad with her mother, when scarcely more than a child, a few months after the destruction of their plantation by the Federal troops. She was prematurely grown, because of the many responsibilities which devolved upon her during those days, especially in connection with the great fair in aid of the Confederacy which was held in Liverpool in the first or second year of the war. Her father, who rose to be a general, was killed about that time in a cavalry skirmish, and was duly apotheosized in the Confederate press. He was a cool-headed and sagacious man, who had drawn his sword reluctantly, but had wielded it bravely, when no other choice remained for him. This one daughter, who resembled him as much as a woman can resemble a man without loss of charm, had been his pet and dearest companion from her earliest years. He had recognized from the first the fineness of her nature, and imbued her with respect for her own personality. Her mother, who was amiable and com-

monplace, was frankly puzzled at the sensation Constance made, but accepted the general estimate of her, and sank into willing subordination. Some women are born to be rulers and some to be slaves, and it is not difficult to discover the category to which each belongs. No one whose opinion was worth anything looked twice at Miss Douglas without recognizing the definiteness and distinctness of her personality and falling under the spell of its warm, sweet radiance. Young Talbot, who was a very sensitive piece of organism, after having absorbed her beauty in its totality, began to analyse it, feature by feature, as he sipped his tea, and came to the conclusion that it was made up of something else besides features. Her blonde, wavy hair, which curled a little about the temples, was arranged in some simple manner, without any visible striving for effect. And yet the effect, Talbot thought, was admirable. The firm and noble lines which formed the contour of her head made him itch to get hold of his pencil. What a wretched botch he had made of her picture, to be sure, and what unpardonable presumption to have tried to paint such an exquisite incarnation of grace and loveliness from a mere mechanical record of her features! The day he could paint Constance Douglas as he saw her he would refuse to take off his hat to Gérôme and Meissonier, and he would sit down and take a smoke on Parnassus, in the company of the immortals, knowing that no power on earth would be able to dislodge him. He had never seen so beautiful a head before; or, on second thought, perhaps he had, but he had never seen one so superbly set upon the shoulders, nor one so grandly carried. In fact, the whole woman was built

upon a grand scale, like a goddess revived, lest men should lose the faculty of worship. The mere combination of fine but not very striking features was quite inadequate to account for the impression which she made. Her forehead was rather low, or at least appeared so, her nose straight and delicately fashioned, the curve of her lips drawn with fine precision, her chin saved by the soft freshness of her complexion from appearing too energetic. But, after all, what idea does this imperfect catalogue give of how she really looked? It was the deep-blue eyes, so calm and gently radiant, that lighted up these pure but not unusual features, and a smile that seemed new every time you saw it, and that dignified you in your own eyes whenever it beamed upon you. Sir Percy and Mr. Talbot both felt as if they had been taken into her confidence by that rare smile, and each felt convinced that he possessed her favor in a higher degree than the other. Considering this fact, which disposed them amiably toward creation in general, they concluded to make a few cautious approaches to each other, simply out of regard for the charming hostess who was responsible for their acquaintance.

"I shouldn't wonder if I might get you some rare specimens of shells from Florida," Talbot ventured to remark, lifting his mild blue eyes shyly to the Englishman's hirsute countenance.

"You are—aw—very civil, I am sure," Sir Percy remarked, a trifle gruffly. "I have all the—aw—Floridian shells already; and unless you should—aw—happen to discover a new species, which I don't suppose you would—aw—be likely to do, I really shouldn't care for them, you know."

Talbot felt as if he had been slapped in the face, and strove vainly to conceal his discomfiture. Miss Douglas, who was quick to interpret the blush that mantled his cheeks, hastened to apply balm to his wounded feelings.

"You know, Mr. Talbot," she said, sweetly, "that Sir Percy has probably the greatest collection of marine shells in the world, and has long since explored our American waters. Now, I should be perfectly delighted if you would give me a few specimens of your Florida shells, just because they are American, you know, and from the dear land of Dixie."

It was not only the words, but the cordiality with which they were uttered which suddenly raised the young man to a pinnacle of distinction. He looked down upon the baronet with exultation from glorious heights.

"If you will permit me to send you the few modest conchs which I picked up two winters ago on the Florida reefs," he said, with happy animation, "I shall be very much pleased."

"I shall expect them surely, and I shall hold them to my ear in the hope that they will murmur some melody of the Southern sea."

"I hope they will, I'm sure; but I am afraid they will disappoint you. You know, of course, I have no scientific knowledge of shells, like Mr.—Mr. Percy—beg your pardon—Mr. Armitage, I mean."

The poor fellow turned his eyes appealingly to Miss Douglas. He knew he was blundering, but he could not make up his mind to call a stranger by his first name. He seemed to be running his head into a noose in whatever direction he turned. Miss Douglas

returned his glance with smiling sympathy, and was about to speak, but was anticipated by Sir Percy.

"You do me more—aw—honor than I deserve," he said. "I have no—aw—scientific interest whatever in shells. The fact is, I was—aw—suffering from a disease of the liver, and my physician ordered me to get up—aw—some interest in something—aw—or other, just to divert me, you know, and make time pass. I tried race-horses, but—aw—got tired of them. I couldn't help backing my own—aw—beasts, you know. I didn't mind so much the money I lost on them; but the—aw—vexation, you know, the vexation—that was having a bad effect on my system, and I had—aw—to give them up."

"I don't wonder," Constance replied, "at your giving up your race-horses. But those beautiful cows you showed me at Donnymere, three years ago—I can scarcely forgive you for selling them."

"Blooded cattle, you know aré—aw—an awful bore," the baronet rejoined, with the emphasis of conviction. "I tried Alderneys first, but—aw—they ran all to cream and wasted money. They gave—aw—too rich milk and too little of it to pay for their feed and care. I had—aw—no better luck with the—aw—Jerseys; and as for the shorthorns, I could have murdered them before—aw—I was done with them. But they spared me the trouble, for they—aw—had an unpleasant habit of dying without—aw—a moment's warning."

"But I have a tender spot in my heart for those lovely cows yet," Constance declared. "If they had been mine, I should have been tempted to go into mourning for them."

Half an hour passed, and they sat chatting and sipping tea and luxuriating in a vague, unobtrusive felicity which it seemed a pity to make an end of. Sir Percy was waiting for Talbot to make the signal for departure, and Talbot was waiting for Sir Percy. To tear one's self away from the presence of a woman so perfect in face, dress, and manner requires a heroism of which neither was possessed. There was a sweet intoxication in merely listening to her voice and in inhaling the aroma of her exquisite personality. But the entrance of the maid Hortense, carrying a silver salver upon which lay a card whose small size indicated that it belonged to the masculine gender, was felt as a discord and sufficed to break the spell.

Sir Percy got up with a desire to strangle the gentleman who had the impertinence to choose such an inopportune moment for his call, and Talbot made three efforts to detach himself from his chair. He was quite clear in his mind that he would have liked to spend the rest of his life in Miss Douglas's company; but he was not at all sure that she reciprocated his desire. With a good deal of blushing and confusion, he managed, however, to make his exit without having committed himself, and brushed in the door-way against an officer in a splendid French uniform, the scabbard of whose sword knocked against the stairs at each step he took. He noticed, too, that Sir Percy, who was a few steps behind him, bowed to the gorgeous Gaul with a ferocity as if he would like to eat him.

"That monkey of a Frenchman!" he muttered to himself, as he descended the stairs.

But from within they presently heard, through the

yet unclosed door, Miss Constance's voice greeting the visitor with joyous cordiality.

"Count de Saint-Réault!" she exclaimed, in French. "I am pleased to see you."

CHAPTER IX.

CRAMPTON'S BEQUEST.

It was early in December when Julian Burroughs and his cousin arrived in Rome and installed themselves in temporary lodgings at Madame Waldbach's, on the Piazza di Spagna. To go into a *pension* was utterly repugnant to Julian; but what else could he do with a young lady on his hands who had a genius for making compromising acquaintances? To go into luxurious bachelor quarters with Delia was, of course, out of the question, and to stay at a hotel, where she would be sure to commence her propaganda in favor of the "emancipation waist" would be altogether too embarrassing. His inclination was to renounce all responsibility for her and leave her to her own devices; but somehow his conscience rebelled against this expedient, without yet suggesting any other that was less liable to moral objections.

The Waldbach *pension* was, indeed, good, as Roman *pensions* go, and the rooms which the young American occupied were the best in the house; but the *cuisine*, which everybody else praised, tried his temper, and the invariable grated chestnuts with cream for dessert aroused all manner of unchristian sentiments

within him. The landlady, who had an immense respect for wealth, bowed herself in the dust before him and nearly went into hysterics with anxiety to please him. He was the only boarder she had ever had who paid her numerous extras without a grumble or a single word of comment, which circumstance, in connection with the fact that he wore gold buttons in his *robe-de-nuit*, filled her with abject admiration. She did not even summon courage to tell him of her aristocratic pedigree and the lavish ways and propensity for gambling of her late husband, who had been instrumental in bringing her down in the world. Nor did she venture on sufficient familiarity to confide to him the various proposals of marriage she had received from Roman princes with historic names and slender purses who had hoped to quarter themselves on her and obtain free board during their declining years. There had never been a man or woman before among the successive generations of Madame Waldbach's boarders who had not been favored with her romantic autobiography, and it was, in the end, inflicted upon Julian, too, by the indiscretion of his talkative cousin. Delia had not a shadow of doubt regarding its authenticity, and she found it, moreover, extremely entertaining. All stories that tended to the discredit of the lords of creation found in her a stanch believer. She passionately championed the cause of every woman whose position in the world was undesirable, and held man, individually and collectively, responsible for her misfortunes. She believed well of every member of her own sex whom she met—provided she did not assume a hostile attitude toward her gospel of emancipation—and, with a beautiful lack of judgment, sym-

pathized with every romantic delusion or hysterical vagary that was poured into her ears.

Julian's first business after having solved the question of domicile was to hunt up Talbot; but, for some inscrutable reason, Talbot had covered his tracks, and it was next to impossible to find him. He did not know, to be sure, that his friend was in Rome, and could not, therefore, be regulating his movements with a view either to meeting or avoiding him. Julian inquired in vain both at the American banker's and at the legation, and came at last to the conclusion that Talbot had lingered somewhere on the way, or possibly gone on some excursion in search of the picturesque in the Alban or Sabine Mountains. He succeeded, however, in convincing the minister of his identity and in obtaining possession of the collection of paintings and *bric-à-brac* which Crampton had left him. He invaded his late friend's apartments, which had been sealed by a magistrate, until the proper heir should present himself in person or by a legally authorized representative.

Julian started slightly as, having broken the seal with the aid of two officers of the law, he entered the little brick-paved corridor. It seemed to him that some intangible presence rose out of the dusk to meet him. A sepulchral chill made him shudder, and the close, humid smell affected him unpleasantly. He pushed open the door to the sitting-room, which was also sealed, and crossed the threshold into a little museum of vases, paintings, Etruscan pottery, bronze statuettes, antique gems, and *objets de vertu* of all kinds. He made haste to open the windows and let the sunshine pour in. Though he was not a nervous

person, he could not rid himself of the impression that his dead friend was hovering about him, as if reluctant to part with these treasures, which in life had been his chief delight. From the windows there was a view of a sunny little garden, with orange-trees, dark-green hedges, and tall, stuccoed walls. The soil seemed to be two or three feet higher than the street below, and a shrine at the farther end, which had once been half-way up the wall, was now on a level with the gravel walk. Round about the horizon was broken with towers, domes, and spires, which had, to the American, a kind of pictorial unreality, like a brilliant glimpse of fairy land. There was something brightly rigid, immobile, and perhaps a little glaring in it, and he would not have been surprised if it had vanished to give place to some new scene of enchantment. This impression, however, lasted but for a moment. The abundant light that bathed the earth in a glare of color acquired an unsuspected softness and sweetness in all sorts of richly mellow gradations and semitones, the longer his eyes dwelt upon this incomparable panorama of earth and sky.

And here George Crampton had lived, loved, and died. Here he had raved through the last turbulent months of his life, wrestled with his passion, and finally succumbed. The air seemed charged with a ghostly echo of his voice, and a certain abrupt cadence of his laugh haunted his friend's ears with uncomfortable persistence. The thought of the nothingness, the futility of human life overwhelmed him. Why do we live, if we are to end thus? he asked himself; and neither religion nor philosophy suggested an answer. That rich and lovable personality which bore

the name George Crampton, what has become of it now? What is there to show as the result of those thirty years of enthusiastic activity? How could anything so distinct and definite, so instinct with the subtlest vitality, so unlike anything else that ever was or probably will be, cease to exist, dissolve into earth and air, evaporate into insentient elements whether of spirit or matter?

Julian Burroughs had never been greatly troubled by these questions before. He had lived on from day to day, absorbed in petty pursuits and ambitions, and expended his energies in devising new pleasures for the morrow. Polished and self-restrained as he appeared in his outward conduct, he had yet another side to his nature, which was hinted at in his imperious glance and the leonine cast of his features. He had a spark of barbarian untamability, of hot primitive passion, in his blood, which long subjection to social conventions had half smothered, but which yet could flare up on occasions when social restraints were released. He had, at least, one stinging memory to which reference has already been made; and he would have given much to have it blotted out from his past. Somehow the degradation of it did not seem to grow less with time. He was yet writhing in hours of retrospect with a poignant sense of shame; and at the same time in moments of reaction longing for the old degrading relation, which had filled so large a part of his life, and left, at present, so glaring a void. It was, perhaps, an unconfessed fear, that after his congressional defeat he might, from sheer vacuity, drift back into the arms of that pitiless, sordid, and vulgarly beautiful woman, which had been a co-opera-

ting factor in his sudden determination to go to Europe. But there had been another and nobler motive of which, however, he was also ashamed. Men do not, he reflected, in the nineteenth century start out on a quixotic quest for beautiful women whom they have never seen; and when he, nevertheless, had done so, it argued the presence of an adventurous strain in his blood, which by atavism, he must have received from the ages of chivalry. He had now come to the cross-roads in his life where he had to make a definite choice of direction for good or for ill. There had been moments when, with a limp despair, he had even contemplated yielding to his father's wish, and marrying his cousin, merely as a refuge from himself and a safeguard against temptation. But his better nature had promptly rebelled against such an ignoble expedient; and he straightened himself up, and resolved to fight his battle alone, and drag down no life but his own, if defeat were to be his destiny.

Having mechanically signed half a dozen papers which were placed before him, Julian dismissed the bailiffs, or whatever they were, seated himself with his overcoat on in Crampton's easy-chair, and surrendered himself to solemn reflections. The sunshine poured in through the open windows and showed him to advantage the beautiful bronze "Narcissus" and the "Dancing Faun" which stood *vis-à-vis* on black basalt columns, on each side of the door. The upper walls were entirely covered with pictures, and there were ebonized shelves over the lintels which exhibited fine specimens of black and yellowish-brown Etruscan vases; while the next room was a blaze of beautiful color, produced by antique and modern ceramics of

most exquisite workmanship. It was the collecting and classifying of these things which had occupied Crampton's thought, to the exclusion of everything else, during many years of his life, and there seemed to be something coldly brutal in taking loveless possessions of treasures upon which so much love had been expended. There were things here for which many a collector's mouth would have watered; particularly a beautifully arranged historical series running around the entire room, illustrating the evolution of the art of pottery from the Assyrian sun-baked bricks through Egyptian, Greek, and Etruscan transitions to the French faience, Dutch Delft ware, Italian majolica, Sèvres porcelain, and Dresden, Wedgwood, and modern Chinese and Japanese. The last piece in the series had a hole in it, about the size of a finger, from which small cracks radiated. From an idle impulse Julian rose and examined it; as he moved it he saw a pistol bullet which stuck loosely in the wall. He discovered presently that the cretonne covering of the easy-chair in which he had been sitting had a large crimson stain which some one had ineffectually tried to wash away. While he stood staring sadly at it, the sense of another presence in the room became so acute that he looked up with a startled glance. He listened intently, but the stillness about him was profound. He felt a dull heartache; an intolerable dazed heaviness stole over him. Good God! what a miserable, ignoble creature he was! This man whom he had called his friend, who, for some inscrutable reason, had lavished his affection upon him—in what a pure atmosphere of artistic enthusiasm he had passed his days! of what heroic devotion he had been capable! and with what

reckless courage he had ended his life, when it refused him the highest prize for which he had despairingly striven! But he—Julian Burroughs—had wallowed in swinish ease and indulgence. His interest in art had been mere vanity. He needed some kind of brilliant upholstery to his sordid life, and he had found it in art. He had never, like Crampton, eaten dry bread and salt for dinner, for weeks, in order to save the money for the purchase of an Etruscan vase, or a bronze Bacchante, or a rare *intaglio*. He had never known the high delights of an exquisite connoisseurship. He had, in fact, known nothing high or exquisite. He had been a groveling earth-worm, unendowed with starry vision—a purblind bat, fluttering about with a gross contentment, catching insects in the dark.

The tragedy of his friend's life lost its horror, and grew, by comparison with his own, noble and beautiful. Crampton's spirit, which was so vividly impressed upon these objects and their arrangement, became a reproach to Burroughs, and made him blush for his own past. He yearned dimly for some grand passion, which, even though it were hopeless, might dignify his existence and redeem it from its ugliness and base futility.

CHAPTER X.

ARCADES AMBO.

I do not know whether it was fate or chance or the common grudge against the obnoxious French-

man which drew Talbot and Sir Percy together and inclined them to a few exchanges of frigid civility. Thus, when they met by accident, a few days after their call upon Miss Douglas, in a small bronze shop in the Via Margutta, the baronet submitted some specimens of the craftsman's art to the young American and asked his opinion of them. Talbot, in whose mind Sir Percy, with all his disagreeableness, was somehow associated with Miss Douglas, resolved to be amiable, and gave quite an elaborate opinion, which revealed incidentally his taste and intimate knowledge.

"Why, to be sure, you are—aw—rather clever, don't you know?" the Briton observed, with a frank surprise which was anything but complimentary to his interlocutor.

Talbot, who always blushed when he did not know what else to do, exhibited a flaming and disgusted face, but had no phrase in readiness wherewith to express his displeasure. Sir Percy, on the other hand, who had meant to be particularly pleasant, could not understand how he had given offense.

"These Americans are—aw—rather a queer—aw—lot, uncommonly queer lot," he remarked to the bronze-worker as Talbot picked up his hat and violently jingled the shrill little door-bell in his eagerness to be gone.

A few days later they ran against each other in the Borghese gallery and had again a little disagreement; and before the week had ended they had had at least half a dozen encounters. Sir Percy haunted the galleries early and late, in spite of the fact that he declared them to be a bore—a deuced bore—and Talbot, who was yet in the picturesque intoxication which usually comes in the second or third week of one's sojourn

in Rome, reveled with a glorious unrestraint in the beauty that crowded in upon him on all hands. He was not in the least afraid of appearing fresh, but praised and condemned with a heedless sincerity which to Sir Percy seemed quite delightful. In fact, he completely conquered the latter's regard by a piece of eccentricity which would scarcely have commended him to anybody else's favor. They had been spending the morning together in the Vatican, Talbot deeply absorbed in the contemplation of Raphael's famous *loggie* and *stanze*, and the baronet stalking about with a bored air and frowning upon every one who crossed his path. They had no intention of keeping company, but as they found themselves by chance on the steps at the hour of closing, and it was raining hard, Sir Percy could not well avoid offering the young man a seat in his cab.

"I am much obliged," said Talbot; "but I should have to take you out of your way; I have to go to the telegraph office."

"Never mind. I'll take you there."

Away they rolled past the great fountain and the long colonnade that incloses the Square of St. Peter, and after a short drive reached the telegraph office, where the painter alighted.

"You won't take it amiss—aw," began Sir Percy, when after an absence of a few minutes he returned, "if I ask you—aw—if you telegraphed for money, don't you know? Artists, you know, and that sort of thing—aw—well, you mustn't be huffy about it, but if—aw—I can accommodate you in any way, you needn't hesitate to let me know; that is, if you feel like it, don't you see?"

Talbot was too vividly conscious of the Briton's benevolent intention to be at all huffy, but, for all that, the patronage and condescension implied in this unsolicited offer of pecuniary aid grated upon his sensibilities. He twirled his tawny mustache with nervous indecision, and blushed like a peony, while he summoned courage to stammer: "No, I thank you; I don't need money at all—or rather, I should say, I have all I want for the present. The message I sent related to quite different matters; in fact, it related to Raphael."

"Raphael! Did you telegraph about Raphael?"

"Yes; I telegraphed to the fellows of our club at home that I was disappointed in him."

"You cabled to America that you were—aw—disappointed in Raphael!"

Sir Percy's amazement knew no bounds. He leaned forward with an eagerness not often seen in his apathetic features, and scrutinized the young artist's face with vivid interest.

"You know, the fellows at home set some store by my opinion," Talbot explained, struggling with his embarrassment, "and it is the night of their monthly meeting; they will get it just in time."

"Yes, yes—I shouldn't wonder," observed the baronet. "And the fellows, you say, set store by your—aw—opinion. Well, now—aw—since we are talking about it, so do I. And wouldn't you—aw—come and dine with me to-night, if you have nothing better? And then—aw—you will tell me too—don't you know?—why you are disappointed in Raphael."

Although he had not the least inclination to accept, Talbot vainly hunted in his brain for the proper phrases wherewith to decline, and, failing to find them,

murmured something which sounded like "thanks" and "honor," and which could mean nothing but acceptance. He had, accordingly, no choice but to present himself at the appointed hour at the Palazzo Altemps, where the baronet had a superb apartment, which he rented by the year. Whether it was the wine he drank or the mere artistic aroma of the magnificent high-ceiled rooms which went to Talbot's brain, it was undeniable that his capricious use of language had something peculiarly kindling about it, and Sir Percy was completely fascinated. He made him talk without ceasing, drew him out by all sorts of ingenious questions, and incited him to controversy by contradiction.

"Those fishermen of Galilee," the young enthusiast exclaimed, in his fiery indictment of Raphael's art, "what sort of fish, I should like to know, could they have caught with those ample academic robes? If you ever caught a blue-fish on a trolling-line, or a black bass with a grasshopper on your hook, you will admit the absurdity of the costume of Raphael's apostles. But they are only surpassed in absurdity by the faces. Men with such noble, pensive brows, such philosophic melancholy, do not take to fishing for a living; and, if they did, they would starve at it. Their classic features would become furrowed, scratched, and weather-beaten. And, I confess, to me they would be far more beautiful if the wind, the sun, and the rain had put the stamp of toil and suffering upon them. But the whole academic art is a falsehood from beginning to end—a beautiful lie which the nations believed in as long as there were men among them whose genius sufficed to vitalize the lie, to fill it with their own blood-

red personalities. Therefore I like Michael Angelo's colossal conceptions, even if they be lies, better than Raphael's; because the man behind them is so great that you care for nothing except his stupendous self—his mighty thought that sprang into being in stone and marble and color."

"I swear," remarked Sir Percy, when, long after midnight, he took leave of his transatlantic guest, "I would take my oath on it that I never met a cleverer fellow than you in all my life. I have been pretty much everywhere—don't you know?—but men and—aw—women are about as stupid in China as they are in London, and in Kamchatka as in Paris. But you—I'd take my oath on it—you are—aw—you are uncommonly clever. You must dine with me soon again, and I'll have some—aw—pleasant people here to meet you."

That was the beginning of the curious friendship, which so long puzzled the Eternal City, between Sir Percy Armitage, Bart., and the young and obscure American George Talbot, Esq., whose career forms a not unimportant portion of the present narrative. It was but a few days after the above-recorded meeting that the painter was induced to take up his quarters in the Palazzo Altemps, where he fared sumptuously and entertained his host by his iconoclastic opinions. He inspected the famous collection of marine shells which had cost its proprietor a moderate fortune, and which had kept him for several years in a spasmodic vacillation between the antipodes. Most people hearing of his good fortune envied him, and there was but one who expressed regret; and that was Miss Douglas.

CHAPTER XI.

AMONG THE DEAD.

IT was about a week after his removal to the Palazzo Altemps that George Talbot received a card informing him that Mrs. and Miss Douglas would be at home every Wednesday afternoon from January 1 until April 1—an announcement which filled his breast with conflicting emotions. He had about made up his mind that Miss Douglas was too absorbing a creature to admit of a divided allegiance. A man could scarcely cultivate the arts and her at the same time. He would have to take his choice and abide by it. That it would be folly for him to aspire for the love of so queenly a woman, accustomed to universal homage, was a reflection which in his saner moments often invaded the young man's mind. But the old proverb, "Nothing venture, nothing win," seemed so very appropriate in this connection that he could not afford to turn a deaf ear to the faint whisper of hope which it contained. He had walked about in a state of feverish uneasiness during the last week, nursing all sorts of wild plans whereby to attract the world's attention, and thereby Miss Douglas's favor. But there was always a hitch in all of them which made it seem advisable to postpone their execution to a more convenient time. He was so occupied with these fantastic schemes that he forgot his promise to Burroughs to take charge of the Crampton collection, and ship it to New York. Things which had no relation to Miss Douglas had to him no reality. And when he remembered

that he had actually given his word to Burroughs to help him identify his fair unknown, and perhaps even smooth the road for an acquaintance, his whole soul rebelled against such generous folly, and he began to exert himself to find excuses for not keeping his promise. He found it impossible to work while this frame of mind lasted, and therefore placed himself entirely at Sir Percy's disposal, roaming with him over the Campagna, and visiting Tivoli, Frascati, Tusculum, and all the delightful villages in the Alban and Sabine Mountains. It was during one of these idle rambles that they happened to enter the ghastly crypt of the Capuchin monastery where the mummified corpses of dead monks stand in niches along the walls, and skulls, teeth, shoulder-blades, and thigh-bones, arranged in architectural designs, curdle one's blood with their hideous object lessons in mortality. Sir Percy, who had once contemplated a collection of similar mortuary relics to be artistically arranged in his private chapel at Donnymere, was talking laborious and incorrect Italian with the monk who acted as their guide, being anxious to know whether the monastery (considering the fact that the Italian Government would be sure to confiscate the collection sooner or later) might not be induced to sell out at a reasonable price, and have the skeletons and the soil from Jerusalem exported to England, where the good brothers would have a much better chance of an undisturbed sleep while awaiting the summons of the last trump. The monk, who was accustomed to all sorts of queer propositions from Englishmen, smiled blandly, but refused to commit himself.

“I suppose the old fellow expects—aw—some day

himself to decorate the vault with his—aw—ribs and legs and empty eye-sockets,” Sir Percy remarked in English to Talbot, who stood lost in contemplation of a hooded corpse, whose fleshless hands and nose were protruding from the sacred soil.

“It is more likely he has staked his soul’s salvation on the chance of sleeping for a while in the soil of Golgotha, until a later claimant comes and ousts him,” said the American. “Those monks often have peccadilloes on their conscience which require heroic treatment.”

“Thin it is a moighty slim chance Oi have, sorr,” the monk remarked, in the broadest Irish brogue. “’Tis the guverrnmint of the infidel usurrpers won’t allow no more burrials insoide the walls at all, at all.”

He turned with an air of deep disgust toward the door, which was being opened from the outside, admitting a broad stream of sunlight, in which the illuminated dust danced. A tall, fine-looking girl, accompanied by a grave, dark-complexioned gentleman, entered, and advanced with brisk and rather masculine stride toward the friar. She wore a brown ulster, with big owl’s-head buttons, stylishly made, but a trifle loud; and her pretty blonde head was adorned with a rakish-looking hat of picturesque originality. The friar stared with candid amazement at this startling phenomenon, and put her down mentally as an American. Her escort was attired in a black Prince Albert coat and trousers of a small black and white check. He carried a light-brown spring overcoat on his arm, and in his hand a stout, gnarled, silver-headed cane of the latest fashion. His handsome, dark-

bearded face had a troubled air, and his eyes looked as if he had spent a sleepless night

"Cousin Jule," said the girl, in a bold, but not unmelodious voice, "what did you take me into such a nasty place for? I don't like dead folks, especially when they stand up on end, and pretend to be sociable."

"I think it is a very interesting place," her companion retorted; "at all events, it is one of the places which you can't afford to miss seeing. It gives one an awful sense of worthlessness—of cheapness and perishability—to see one's self turned into lintels and doorposts and architectural ornaments. Well, life is horribly cheap, any way."

"Oh, don't preach to me, Jule," the girl exclaimed, with a laugh, which resounded strangely in the sepulchral vault. "You know it is no good. Who did you say these interesting gentlemen are?"

"Capuchins."

"Yes, I see they have got caps, but I don't think their chins are much to brag of."

She laughed again, and lifted her umbrella as if to poke one of the defunct friars with the end of it. Her companion, whose sobriety seemed a rebuke to her levity, quickly seized her wrist and held it in a tight grip.

"Delia," he said, sternly, "do not carry your antics too far. You know I am responsible for you."

"Well, I like that!" she ejaculated, with a saucy fling of her head. "If you are responsible for me, Jule Burroughs, you have a pretty big contract on your hands, I tell *you*."

She took a little swaggering promenade in front

of the great wall of skulls, as if to assert her independence, and then, returning to her mentor, coolly observed :

"I should like these gentlemen better, Jule, if they had a little more flesh on their bones."

"I should like you better," he retorted, "if you would kindly restrain your flippancy a little."

Talbot, who had been standing with Sir Percy at the farther end of the crypt, with his back to the newcomers, had listened with surprise and embarrassment to this colloquy. He had instantly recognized the voice of the irrepressible Delia; and at the sight of Burroughs, the thought flashed through his brain that he had entirely neglected the commission with which he had charged him. A dim suspicion, too, arose in his mind that Julian's infatuation with the portrait of Miss Douglas might have something to do with this otherwise unaccountable Roman pilgrimage.

"Countrymen of yours, apparently," said Sir Percy, with that quiet satisfaction which an Englishman feels when an American shows himself to disadvantage.

"Yes, apparently," sighed Talbot.

"Do you know them?"

"I am afraid I do—that is, I have met them. The girl is a horror. I have not yet looked at her, but her style is unmistakable."

"Who is she?"

"Miss Saunders—Cordelia Saunders, known to the newspapers as the Beautiful Heathen. She is a dress-reformer, temperance-lecturer, woman-suffragist, and I don't know what not. She has written a book on the Mormons, with her picture with a high man's collar on, as a frontispiece." Talbot was aware that it was

not a noble sentiment which possessed him. He hoped in some way to sneak out unobserved. For he knew that if he had to face Burroughs there was no escape from the necessity of making him acquainted with Miss Douglas. And to prevent this he was resolved to exert all the arts of his diplomacy. Knowing what he did of Julian's past, having received proof of his disposition toward Miss Douglas, and feeling his own inferiority in point of physique and worldly station, he could scarcely be expected to snuff out his own hopes by introducing so formidable a rival.

Miss Saunders, who in her promenade had approached the two gentlemen, was suddenly struck with the resolute and uncompromising look of the large and the small back which they presented to her. She saw at once that there was an intention in their unnatural immobility, and guessed easily what that intention was. The spirit of devilry was aroused in her, and she stationed herself behind them and viewed them with exaggerated interest. Sir Percy's broad figure, arrayed in a rough Tweed sack-coat and trousers, his red, angry-looking neck, covered with fine hair which here and there grew in capricious little curls, his stout legs wide apart, and his hands thrust into his coat-pockets, seemed to her a very epitome of Great Britain, while Talbot's imitation of the attitude on a smaller scale seemed no less characteristically American.

"Are these two part of your collection?" she asked the Irish monk, in her loud voice, pointing at the two backs with her umbrella.

"No, mum; not as I know of, mum," replied the friar, curbing his Hibernian wit, which suggested quite a different answer.

"Jule," she continued, turning to her companion, who was again at her side, "you don't think there is any chance of my selling any of my emancipation waists to any of these gentlemen? On the whole, I think they are dressed in a very sensible fashion. I have no reform to suggest except in their manners."

Sir Percy, who a moment ago had been bristling with dignity and anger, found this remark so droll that he had to laugh.

"She is rather clever, don't you know?" he whispered to his *protégé*. "Suppose we turn around and walk out?"

"I would rather not, if you don't mind," Talbot replied, blushing furiously.

"Well, why not?" Sir Percy urged; "she is very good fun, don't you know?"

Before the young man had time to answer he heard his name pronounced in a loud, surprised *staccato*.

"Why, Georgie Talbot!" cried Miss Saunders, enthusiastically, grasping his hand and shaking it as if she meant to shake it off. "I am delighted to see you. Why, it rejoices my soul to see your good American face, even though your hair is parted in the middle."

"Yours, I presume, is parted on the side," he answered, with a feeble smile; "so, of course, I had no other expedient left to indicate my sex by."

"Good for you, Georgie! Why, you've grown quite smart since I saw you last."

"Permit me to suggest that it is you who have acquired greater penetration."

"Now, that is not bad, either. In fact, it is rather good. Why, George Talbot, I haven't appreciated you

properly. We must see a good deal of each other this winter. I am staying at Madame Waldbach's, on the Spanish Piazza—isn't that it? You know where that is?"

"Yes, I know."

"I am at home pretty much every evening, and shall be expecting you real soon."

"Thank you. I shall be sure to call."

"And your friend there—if you want to bring him along, he is welcome."

Talbot, although he had been standing on needles, expecting some such breach of etiquette, was so shocked that he scarcely knew what to answer. He was determined to save Sir Percy an undesirable acquaintance, even at the expense of his own politeness, and was just framing some transparent excuse, when, to his astonishment, the baronet stepped up, as if to participate in the conversation. He had then, of course, no choice but to introduce him.

"Sir Percy Armitage, Miss Saunders," he murmured, gazing from the one to the other, and wondering what the world was coming to.

"Pleased to make your acquaintance, Miss Saunders," said Sir Percy, stiffly.

"I knew you were an Englishman the moment I put my eyes on you," exclaimed Cordelia, unabashed. "Our American gentlemen never have such necks and such backs; at least it isn't the part of themselves they are proud of and want to show off."

A gleam of amusement lighted up Sir Percy's eyes, and he chuckled again. He saw the point of her sarcasm well enough, but he chose not to notice it.

"Yes, your climate—aw—is rather drier than

ours," he remarked, in his heavy drawl. "It does not develop a sturdy physique."

"Yes, and our habits are drier, too," she retorted. "We don't drink so much."

"I wasn't aware of that. I thought—aw—your national pride was based largely on your mixed drinks. At all events—aw—I found it so when—aw—I was in America, three years ago."

"You evidently got into bad company, Mr. Armitage. You know mixed society is quite as destructive of morals as mixed drinks."

"Next time I go, I shall—aw—with your permission, put myself in your charge, and you will—aw—inform me where I can study the national manners to advantage."

"I shall be delighted. You know I have recently taken the European agency for the emancipation waist, which is to take the place of the tight and ruinous corsets with which women now undermine their health. If I could have an English baronet in tow, it would be worth a hundred thousand as an advertisement."

"I don't quite see that, you know. But—aw—I am not sure—aw—that I should relish being appreciated—aw—in the light of an advertisement."

They kept up this international sparring for some minutes, Delia chuckling to herself at the thought of how she was shocking the Englishman, and the Englishman amiably resolved not to be shocked. The young lady's freedom of manner and girlish bravado amused and interested Sir Percy, and he was charitably inclined to make all possible allowance for her, considering her origin.

Julian had in the mean while advanced and shaken hands with Talbot.

"What the deuce have you been doing with yourself, old man?" he exclaimed; "I have hunted for you with a lantern in every hole I could think of, and not a trace of you have I found. Not even the minister knew anything about you."

"No, I haven't called upon him yet," said Talbot, dryly.

"Well, would you mind giving an account of yourself? I am rather curious."

"Oh, well—I have been strolling about in search of the picturesque, you know," the painter replied, with forced indifference; "I have been out at Tivoli and Castel-Gandolfo and Genazzano, and I don't know where I haven't been. I was like a man who had starved for a century, and devoured with a wild avidity every thing that came in my way."

"And the commission I charged you with—I don't suppose you have found time to attend to that?"

"No, really, Burroughs; I don't think that was quite fair on your part. I have been a good many queer things, no doubt, but I draw the line there. I positively refuse to be your *postillon d'amour*."

"I wasn't aware I had ever asked any such service of you," Burroughs replied, with ominous gravity.

"Well, it was that portrait, you know, or the original of it, I should say; and you wanted me to find out who it was—wasn't that it?"

Talbot was no diplomatist, and his air of lofty unconcern was too transparent to deceive any one. His blush, too, betrayed him, and a certain floundering in-

security in his manner showed how uncomfortable he was.

"You need tell me nothing more, Talbot," said Julian, with pitying superiority; "you have seen the lady, and you want, if possible, to prevent me from seeing her."

A sudden manœuvre on Delia's part happily absolved Talbot from answering. She turned with her usual abruptness to her cousin, and said:

"Jule, isn't it true that a lot of English lords have gone into the dry-goods and butcher business in the United States?"

Burroughs was on the whole not ill pleased at her interruption, and he answered, rapidly, taking care only to address her:

"No, I think you are mistaken. But there are several noblemen who are engaged in cattle-raising out in Montana."

"Oh, yes; that was what I was referring to. Excuse me, Mr. Percy, this is my cousin, Mr. Burroughs, of New York. You mustn't mind his rather savage looks. He has just been running for Congress, and been defeated."

Julian, though showing displeasure at the uncere-
moniousness of the introduction, lifted his hat and made a stiff bow to Sir Percy.

"I am pleased to make your—aw—acquaintance. Mr.—aw—Burroughs," drawled the baronet, returning the bow with equal superciliousness.

It was a little embarrassing to resume the thread of the jocular conversation after this awkward episode, and, prompted by a simultaneous impulse, all began to move toward the door. Sir Percy gave a *lira* to the

monk, as he emerged into the daylight, and received in return his blessing. He then dumfounded Talbot by inviting Miss Saunders and her cousin to occupy the vacant seats in his carriage, and by betraying an interest in the lady's slangy remarks which seemed quite incomprehensible. The mere fact that she was pretty could scarcely account for such eccentric conduct on the part of a middle-aged gentleman who was nothing short of an oracle in matters of etiquette. Miss Saunders was apparently twenty-five or twenty-six years old, and, though rather loud, was neither in dress nor appearance vulgar. Whether she herself wore the emancipation waist from which she promised herself such untold blessings to the race, could not by a superficial view be determined; but her tailor-made ulster fitted very snugly about her tall, handsome form, and her boots were so neat and shapely that you felt tempted to shake hands with them. She had blonde hair and a good complexion, but her most distinctive feature was her pale-blue eyes, with that challenging stare in them, which turned their inquisitive light with the same irreverent scrutiny upon whatever came in their way. In the whole cut and expression of her face there was something unshrinking, unveiled, and frankly resolute. It might have been a handsome boy's face, except for the lips, whose soft curve was feminine. You saw that she had set out in an adventurous mood to conquer the world, and that she anticipated no great difficulty in accomplishing her purpose. With all her audacity, she was clothed in innocence as in a garment. Even Sir Percy, though he was no great philosopher, had not talked long with her before he perceived that she was touchingly igno-

rant of the world which she was challenging to battle. He even began to suspect that she misbehaved from principle, or at least exaggerated her disregard of social forms for the purpose of asserting, in the name of her sex, her contempt for them. Sir Percy admitted to himself, as he sat opposite to her in his cab, listening to her glib, reckless talk, that he did not dislike her half as much as he had expected. She refused to be classified, of course, and it was impossible to pick out any social sphere to which she belonged. But then that was a peculiarity she had in common with the majority of her countrymen, who were impossible, from the English point of view, and yet, considered from any other point of view, not only possible, but both clever and entertaining. Sir Percy, being at present abroad and bent upon amusement, resolved in a mild and harmless way to cultivate Miss Saunders.

CHAPTER XII.

A CHARMING TÊTE-À-TÊTE.

GEORGE TALBOT was enjoying the felicity of a *tête-à-tête* with Miss Douglas in the little Renaissance reception room. There were a hundred things he would have liked to tell her, but her beauty stupefied him like strong wine and made him incoherent and distracted. All sorts of daring speeches trembled on the tip of his tongue, but when he attempted to utter them they turned out to be feeble and commonplace, and quite different from what he had intended. He

knew, of course, that it would be absurd to talk to her of love on so short an acquaintance, but he had an idea that it would not be amiss if he could convey to her an impression of his profound and abject admiration, without yet trespassing on forbidden territory. Her gentle affability, which was yet so full of reserve, made him suspect a long experience in warding off tender avowals. She was purposely obtuse, because she did not wish to understand. She treated him with a sort of elder-sisterly kindness which was quite exasperating. She was obviously sorry for him, and wished to be spared the necessity of wounding his feelings. He half regretted that he had come; for, of course, it was absurd to court refusal by a premature avowal of his passion. But in his eagerness to anticipate Burroughs, who, he doubted not, would find the means of identifying his fair unknown, and approaching her, he could not summon a sufficiently judicial frame of mind to coolly weigh the risks. He was in a constant fever of anxiety lest Constance by some chance should make his rival's acquaintance; for it began to dawn upon him gradually that Burroughs had made this journey, not on account of Delia's emancipation waist, but with the definite purpose to find the original of Miss Douglas's portrait. If such was the case, how could he hope to thwart him? Burroughs was a man who was not easily balked in anything he made up his mind to do. Talbot's only prospect of success lay evidently in utilizing the brief respite which was left to him, before his friend should get on the track of the game he was hunting.

And yet—and yet—there were moments when Talbot felt the utter futility and ignominy of such a

course. His ears burned with shame at the thought of the despicable *rôle* he was playing. It was of little use that he told himself a hundred times a day that all is fair in love and war; there was an instinct or conscience within him which told him that that which he was doing was not fair. If she had suspected that he had broken his word, and by all sorts of petty arts was preventing a man from approaching her, because of his advantages over himself, would she have pronounced such conduct noble? Would she regard his love as a sufficient excuse for such faithlessness? He did not dare to submit the question to her decision, for, of course, he knew what that decision would be. He had exalted moments, too, when, with a kind of tragic grandeur, he took Burroughs by the hand and conducted him into the beloved one's presence, made a noble speech, bristling with the sublimest sentiment and heaping coals of fire upon the fair one's head, then, with a last ineffable glance at her divine face, turned away and plunged out into the black night of despair. He tried repeatedly to brace himself for some such lofty line of action, but the sober second thought spoiled the pathos of the thing and turned it into farce. He would have to adhere to the prose rule of conduct, after all, and look out for his own interests with the sordid vigilance of common sense.

In the mean while, he enjoyed the anxious felicity of breathing the same air that she breathed; of hearing the mellow music of her voice; of sniffing the vague whiffs of jasmine that were wafted toward him whenever she moved. He luxuriated in the sight of her noble, placid face and her exquisitely tasteful costume. He would have been at a loss to describe it;

but the general effect was that of rich and ancient lace, and warm, subdued colors harmoniously blended. Her arms, which were half visible through the sleeves, struck him with wonder, they were so firm and white, and the little dimple in the wrist emphasized the perfection of their modeling. The clear, warm shadow of her chin upon the little glimpse of neck which was bared made him almost shiver with delicious appreciation. He reveled in the sight of her, yet was strangely impressed with her remoteness, her preciousness, her august dignity, by virtue of a beauty which seemed exalted above common humanity.

"I hear from Sir Percy," she was saying, obviously to make conversation, "that you are so charmingly situated in the Palazzo Altemps. I am told your studio is quite a museum of mediæval armor, Eastern rugs, and *bric-à-brac*."

"Eastern rugs—yes, quite so," murmured he, lost in contemplation.

"And, now, I suppose, you are preparing to lay siege to Rome and take it by storm."

"No. Oh, no; I have no hostile intentions whatever," he replied, with burning ears. He was beginning to suspect that he was surpassing himself in assininity.

"It would not be the first time the barbarians have conquered the Eternal City," she observed, with that radiant smile which always put his apprehensions to flight. It was so warm, so satisfying, so reassuring, so expressive of interest and kindly feeling, that all torturing doubt and fear and jarring emotions evaporated in it like dew in the sunshine. As Count de Saint-Réault (an avowed adorer of Miss Douglas) remarked, it would make the damned forget their woes.

It was a sufficient equipment for success both in this world and in the world to come, for it could only belong to a noble and exquisite personality.

"I was a little afraid, Mr. Talbot," she began, after a pause, "that it would not be for your good to be too closely associated with a rich and eccentric man like Sir Percy. You know I believe independence, even if coupled with poverty, to be a precious thing, and, if you will allow me to be frank with you, I have just a foolish little fear that you will not be able to assert your personality in the presence of Sir Percy, if you have to look up to him as your benefactor."

She gazed sweetly at him with her gentle eyes, and there was such a world of kindness and sympathy in her words that the young man could not help being touched. A warm current of emotion gushed through his veins, and he felt irresponsibly and irrationally happy. With an effort he aroused himself, ran his fingers through his hair, and walked abruptly to the window. He was not aware at the time that the view from that window is famous. And to Talbot it did not matter, for he scarcely saw anything of what he was looking at. He turned about at the end of a minute or two, feeling "clothed and in his right mind."

"It is very kind of you, Miss Douglas," he said, with a desperate effort to clear his thoughts, as his eyes again rested upon her, "to feel any apprehension on my account. I have no fear myself of losing my personality in that of Sir Percy. The fact is," he added, recklessly, "my personality is lost already. My heart, my reason, my very soul, is lost, but it is not Sir Percy's fault."

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He had half expected her to ask whose fault it was, but for some reason she betrayed no curiosity to know. He felt a wild need to tear his hair, to rend his clothes, as the Israelites of old did when the world went against them, or to make some other violent demonstration of despair. But her clear, calm voice (which was not a whit less kindly than before) again soothed his agitation and made him cry out to the gods to make him behave rationally.

"That is, on the whole, a very wholesome feeling," she said, in response to his dithyrambics, "and I should be sorry for an artist who was incapable of the emotion which you describe. It shows that you have intensity of feeling—that you are capable of great things. I like to hear a young man talk in that strain, for it is rare to find one nowadays who has heart and is not afraid of showing it."

Talbot felt that if he stayed a moment longer he would be sure to do or say something which would compel her to dash his hopes to the ground. And, as even the vaguest and absurdest kind of uncertainty was preferable to the pitiless certainty, he was unwilling to challenge the Fates. As he got up to take his leave he chanced to see his face in the mirror, and it gave him quite a shock. His cheeks and forehead were not scarlet, but almost purple, and his features had a look of excitement which suggested insanity. And opposite to him in the mirror stood she, placid as a goddess, and as unattainable. She was smiling affably—a trifle condescendingly, he thought—and it flashed through his mind that he was but one of a long procession of victims who had immolated themselves upon her altar. He was not the first nor

would he be the last. There was poor Crampton who had blown his brains out for love of her ; and yet she stood there serene as Juno, with the same divinely distracting smile. During that brief instant she appeared almost hateful to him, like a cruel, heartless Circe who sat with her adorable face feasting upon broken hearts. But when he bade her adieu, and held her hand in his, the warm thrill of her touch went rippling through his frame, and by the time he had reached the bottom of the stairs the vision of her loveliness rose again before his fancy, and he was ready to do penance in sackcloth and ashes for his disloyal thought.

CHAPTER XIII.

A MELODIOUS INTERLUDE.

JULIAN found the Fates distinctly unpropitious in his search for his fair unknown. But that was, perhaps, more his own fault than that of the Fates. For he set about his quest with many misgivings ; not with the happy unscrupulousness of a conqueror. There was a slow, uneasy ferment in his blood ; an intolerable self-disgust alternating with a yearning desire for a true and unmistakable love, with its idealizing glamour of beauty and romance. It was not the mere vague dreaming of amorous youth ; but the revolt of a man's better nature against an unworthy past and a crying out of a deep eternal need which is implanted in every true man's heart. There was a good deal of

self-deception, no doubt, in the interest with which he surrounded his fair unknown; and it was the suspicion that such was the case which made him frequently pause in his quest. He was inclined to believe, at times, that he was simply deluding himself, and with the zest for romantic hallucination which is more pardonable at twenty than at thirty, coquetting with feelings which were long since extinct. But then, just as he was on the point of acquiescing in this conclusion, the glorious face, with all its sweet dignity, would rise in dewy freshness out of his memory, and kindle his fancy with new ardor.

Rome in its present shrunken state is so small a place that there is slight chance for any one of any consequence to remain hidden. And a woman so beautiful as the one Burroughs was in search of must, of necessity, be a person of tremendous consequence in any community. The stars could not rise and set without being conscious of her presence; moreover, there was the Pincio, where Roman beauty passed in daily review before Roman valor, or what there was left of it. Julian betook himself thither every sunny afternoon, and gazed until his eyes ached at the fair occupants of the carriages, but none did he see that remotely resembled the one whose image filled his soul. He lounged about under the stone-pines and cypresses, blew his cigar-smoke into the marble faces among the trees, which, by their multitude cheapen glory, strolled under the chestnuts and ilexes at the Borghese Gardens, doffed his hat to her smiling Majesty Queen Marguerita, who, with her scarlet footmen and outriders, enlivened the solemn, dark-green monotony, invaded the fine historic villa, and stared the serene goddesses out of counte-

nance in an absent-minded search for one who persisted in eluding him.

Two weeks had passed in this way since Julian arrived in Rome, and Christmas was at hand. He went to bed Christmas Eve with the resolution to take the American minister or the secretary of legation into confidence, or seeming to do so, and by ingenious cross-questioning find out who the lady was who haunted his dreams. But it occurred to him, after a while, that the minister might possibly take him for a fool, as among his multifarious duties that of conducting the love affairs of his traveling countrymen was not included. But in a confidential chat over a glass of wine he could scarcely fail to elicit some valuable gossip from the secretary, who, he understood, was an encyclopædia of fashionable intelligence and the hero of several piquant experiences. Curiously enough, it did not for a moment occur to him to address himself to Talbot, who, he reasoned, by his contemptible conduct, had forfeited all claim to respect. It was easy enough to conjecture how that vivacious little contortionist was now basking in bliss, deceiving himself with an insane hope, and glorying in the privileges from which he imagined that his rival would remain excluded. Julian had a serene sense of superiority to him which relieved him of all uneasiness. He even felt a little sorry for him, as he might for the foolish moth that, in spite of repeated singeing, keeps returning, with a sublime infatuation, to the flame which must become his destruction.

He was just dozing into an uneasy semi-slumber, in which these fancies kept revolving in misty processions, when the chimes of the Trinità de' Monti began

to make a tuneful noise. In another minute the Santa Maria Maggiore broke in with her deep, heavy base; and before he could clear his thoughts, the air shook and trembled, far and near, with a joyfully confused jangle of large and small bells. There were some jolly little treble chimes which simply went mad with exultation, pouring forth a perfect flood of delirious sound; and there were more sedate bells which clanged away, with more regard for appearances, at the heavier middle notes; while far away in the distance the monster bell of St. Peter tolled forth its deep colossal notes, which solemnly lifted its protecting shield over all the minor tumult.

Julian lay and listened for a long while to this harmonious jangle, which rose and fell with a fitful rhythm under the nocturnal sky. He knew that it was futile to attempt to sleep, and he therefore wrapped himself in his dressing-gown, opened the window and looked out upon the moon-flooded city. There were many other windows open, and he saw disheveled heads studding the façades of the stuccoed houses. Down on the square below the fountain was playing, flinging its white spray to catch the shimmering light of the moon. A dozen models and beggars, some awake and some asleep, were scattered up and down the Spanish Stairs; and beyond a jagged expanse of glittering roofs from which, here and there, a church-tower loomed against the sky. The Pincio and the Borghese Gardens traced themselves in misty remoteness upon the horizon. Presently the bells dropped off into silence, one after another, while some perverse laggard kept banging away alone, and from an equally perverse sympathy half a dozen others started in again with fresh energy.

Julian listened to this mighty resonance, filling earth and sky, without much emotion. It had something alien and panoramic in it which deprived it of half its impressiveness. It was not to him a grand outburst of joy at the Savior's birth; it brought no message of peace on earth and good will to men.

"*Die Botschaft hör' ich wohl,*" he quoted from "Faust," "*allein mir fehlt der Glaube.*"

He seemed to himself stolid, earthy, impenetrable to any ray of spiritual light. A kind of stony callousness settled upon his spirits, through which a vague sense of pain trembled. He envied those who could weep and wail and rave; who could throw off that leaden weight of self-consciousness and conventional restraint which strangle the emotional life of the Anglo-Saxon race. There was something dimly laboring within him—a burrowing discontent—an aching soreness, which diffused itself indistinctly through his soul, and made him shrink from the rough shocks of the very experience for which he was hungering. As he was on the point of closing the window, when the bells had long been silent, a low, muffled sound fell upon his ear, and he leaned once more out over the sill. As it came nearer, he distinguished the solemn cadence of a Latin funeral chant rudely intoned by a company of monks. He presently saw a procession of black-robed, black-hooded friars coming up the street; some croaking and some crooning, without much articulation, the stern words of the ancient hymn. The foremost ones carried a coffin upon their shoulders, and the rest followed with a shuffling, shambling gait, droning out the monotonous rhythm of the mournful melody.

Julian who was unacquainted with the strange custom of the Italians to surrender their dead, as soon as the last breath is drawn, to some religious order, gazed with wonder at this strange nocturnal procession. The rude funeral chant impressed him much more than the joyous commotion of the bells; and long after he had retired to bed, the solemn cadence kept ringing in his ears.

CHAPTER XIV.

A GLIMPSE OF THE GODDESS.

THE next morning the sunny Roman sky was again filled with a joyous commotion of bells, and Julian accepted their invitation and betook himself to church. He invited Delia to accompany him, but was not sorry when she declined. She had an engagement with Sir Percy who had offered to take her on a round of all the principal churches, show her the miracle-working *Bambino* at St. John Lateran, and the representation in wax of the Nativity at the Fra Coeli. Julian accordingly strolled up the Via Sistina alone, and emerged suddenly from the old Rome into the new, which parades in the most modern millinery and in shining equipages along the Via Nazionale. It was mostly the foreign colony which disported itself here, this Christmas morning, in purple and fine linen and a sprinkling of Italian officers who moved along the sidewalks, creaking and clanking with leather and metal, studying the bright faces of American heiresses.

Ambassadors in heavy barouches, with glaring footmen and gay armorial bearings, came bowling along the smooth avenue, and now and then a glimpse was caught of a scarlet-robed cardinal through the window of a closed coupé.

It was a beautiful pageant, so vividly modern, so brilliant, so Parisian. And yet, scarcely a stone's throw from these glaring rectangular fronts, with their pitiless newness, slumbered the ancient Rome in mellow dignity and decay, with her burden of bloody memories.

Julian had never known such a feeling of forlorn wretchedness as he did this day, among the cheerful throng, constantly exchanging greetings. He was glad when he reached the church, simply to escape his oppressive sense of loneliness in the midst of the alien crowd. It was the new Episcopal church which attracted all these gayly colored birds of passage, not only because it was in a religious sense alive, but also because it was the most fashionable Protestant church in Rome. It was a stately Renaissance edifice, richly decorated with stone and wooden carvings, aureoled saints, and stained-glass windows. It had a luxurious ecclesiastical air about it which was highly impressive. The altar was one gorgeous mass of flowers, and the columns were wreathed in cypress and holly. The organ was just beginning a vague premonitory rumble, when Julian entered and was conducted by an usher to a seat half-way up the middle aisle. The high, clear treble of the boy choristers was heard in the distance, chanting with a quick, joyous rhythm a Christmas hymn. The congregation arose, the organ rolled forth volumes of exultant sound, and the white-robed pro-

cession came into view and distributed itself in the pews on each side of the chancel. At that moment—which has ever since remained indelibly stamped upon Julian Burroughs's memory—just as he raised his eyes from the hymn-book, he felt something dawn upon his startled vision—a face, a wonderful woman's face—full of sweetness and light and stately innocence. He needed no second glance to convince himself that his quest was at an end. She moved past him slowly, with a noble grace and serenity, which, like the shining mists that enveloped the goddesses of ancient fable, were instinct with a rare and lovely personality. Beside her walked a big, fine-looking officer, in French uniform, and with half a dozen orders on his breast. His spurs clicked, and all his resplendent accoutrements seemed to emphasize the advantages of his robust physique. He stepped with evident care, so as to avoid getting entangled in the lady's drapery, and he carried his sheathed sword in his left hand with the same obvious intent to avoid collisions. Burroughs had to look twice to convince himself that this obnoxious creature (for he was instantly filled with repugnance to the dazzling Gaul) was attached in the capacity of escort to his fair unknown. It suggested so many torturing possibilities. But what a transcendent phenomenon she was! How nobly erect, how simple in her bearing, and yet how impressive! There was none of that raw girlishness and blankness of expression which are attractive only in the *ingénue*. But a certain suggestion of finished worldly affability—a union of sweetness and dignity, which was altogether irresistible. She lifted her eyes for a moment, and they met Julian's. He would have been happy if she had shown

but the faintest embarrassment or any consciousness of the intensity of his glance. But she passed on calmly; and not even a blush or a quickened pace betrayed that she was aware of his existence. And yet it seemed impossible that she had not seen him. His head was in a whirl. His heart beat tumultuously. A fine intoxication pervaded his blood. He felt as if his whole being had been tuned up, and was vibrating with a sense of harmony. It was marvelous, after she had passed out of sight, how the strains of the joyous hymn rang and reverberated in his soul. He became conscious of a sensitiveness which he could scarcely account for. The familiar words of the Christmas gospel, which had, long ago, had their edges worn off by continual repetition, struck him with a new beauty and force. And stranger still, the "Te Deum," which had half repelled him before, by a kind of pious conventionality of phrase, moved him now in the very depths of his being. It was sung with a soprano solo and chorus; and the former, which was of an exquisite purity, seemed to be echoing the cry of his own heart, with its appealing supplication: "Vouchsafe, O God, to keep us this day without sin."

Then, after another lesson, came the Twenty-fourth Psalm, also sung with solo and chorus, and it seemed as if the divine music, as it surged and rushed about him, gave voice to all his dumb, imprisoned agony, and liberated it, so as to soar with glorious wing-beats toward the throne of God.

"Who shall ascend into the hill of the Lord," chanted the *soprano*, with a fine, insistent fervor, "or who shall stand in his holy place?"

"He that hath clean hands and a pure heart," an-

swered a storm of accordant voices; "who hath not lifted up his soul to vanity nor sworn deceitfully."

He that hath clean hands and a pure heart! Ah, what scathing reproach, what inexorable condemnation of all his ignoble past in those sublime words! How unspeakably low and degraded his life seemed when measured by that standard! Clean hands and a pure heart! Alas, he had neither! And he thought, in the midst of his religious fervor, with infinite contrition of that radiant woman whom, after his long search, he had now found. She seemed so hopelessly remote from him, spiritually, with her purity and stately perfection.

Julian Burroughs was not a sentimentalist; he had lived in the midst of the world, and had, from force of habit and example, accepted its standards. The state of his soul had never troubled him, and it did not exactly trouble him now; but a spiritual sense was awakened in him which hitherto had been dormant; a new chord began to vibrate which hitherto had been dumb. It was not eternal damnation he was afraid of, but, if the phrase is permissible, temporal damnation; not the loss of his soul in eternity, but its loss here in this earthly life. There was a region of his being which he had scarcely before been aware of—in which he had never lived, and in which no voice had ever resounded; but by some marvelous process this woman's face had appealed to that dormant part of his nature; a ray had pierced from it into the dark, untrodden domain of his soul, and the hymn had followed in the path she had made and aroused dim powers and slumbering energies. Here he stood, for the first time in his life, conscious that he had a soul.

He had often been informed of the fact before, and he had accepted it as, in a general sense, quite probable; but, as far as any manifestation of life was concerned, he might as well have been without it. He had even now a vague misgiving, for might it not be a mere æsthetic susceptibility in him to which this noble face had appealed? And the hymn likewise and the beauty of the service, might not this, too, have aroused mere æsthetic echoes? He was unable to decide the question, nor did he exert himself to decide it, for he had enough to do in following the service, each successive act of which enlisted his earnest attention.

When finally the Reverend Augustus Norman mounted the pulpit and preached one of his dry, decorous, and mildly scholarly sermons, Burroughs felt his spiritual fervor cooling. A kind of chilly antiquarian spirit pervaded Mr. Norman's discourse. He was deeply versed in Oriental lore; had visited the Holy Land, and described the locality of the Saviour's birth and the costumes of the shepherds and the magi with considerable skill. His fine, clean-shaven, ecclesiastical face lighted up with antiquarian enthusiasm, when he depicted the mud huts of Bethlehem, the appearance of the stable, and the squalid nakedness of the class to which Joseph and Mary belonged. He finished with some conventional remarks on the significance of the Saviour's birth amid such lowly surroundings, and then polished his glasses with his handkerchief before pronouncing the benediction.

The singing of the beautiful hymn "Brightest and Best of the Sons of the Morning" tuned Julian once more into a worshipful mood; but, with all his religious exaltation, or what he believed to be such, there

was curiously commingled a sense of the presence of the fair lady whom he had sought so long. Though he frequently let his eyes range up toward the chancel where she must be seated, he failed to catch sight of her; but the mere fact that she was there filled him with contentment. A strange elation rose from the agitated depths of his being, flushed his cheeks, and set his fancy roving through ecstatic possibilities. It did not trouble him much, in his present mood, that he did not know her, that she was probably beyond his reach, that he was unworthy of her. A fatalistic confidence that this one supreme passion of his life must command a response—must, by its own fire, kindle an answering flame—took possession of him. He looked down upon the world from tranquil heights. Existence, resonant with music and luminous with beauty, seemed right. It could never be the result of blind chance. He who made it all must have been capable of grand and noble purposes; and, being omnipotent, he could not swerve or change or be foiled. Surely he could afford to leave his fate in God's hand.

He was in no haste to make his way out when the final benediction had been pronounced, but lingered purposely in his pew until he spied the needle-pointed mustachios of the gorgeous officer against the flowery background of the chancel. It gave him a sharp pang to observe a little fleeting glance of intelligence pass between the proprietor of these mustachios and the lady at his side. It seemed to imply that they knew each other too well to have need of words. Julian's lofty serenity began to be disturbed. He found himself being carried along by the crowd; and when by chance he saw Mr. Endicott Merrill, the secretary of

the American legation, he leaned over toward him and asked :

“ Who is that big officer over there with all that splendid upholstery ? ”

“ Oh, don't you know him ? ” the secretary replied. “ Why, that is Count de Saint-Réault. He is a great swell, a tremendous lady-killer. He is said to be half English and half French, and that may be the reason why he is formidable to both nationalities. ”

“ And who is the lady whom he is escorting ? ”

“ My dear fellow, do you mean to say that you have been in Rome for two weeks and don't know who she is ? If I had been told of it, I shouldn't have believed the thing possible. ”

“ Well, then, who is she ? ”

“ Then you are really sincere ? You don't know ? Well, she is Circe, the enchantress. Only she does not turn men into swine, but she turns swine into men. To be in love with her is a wholesome and chastening experience. It strengthens both one's humility and one's self-respect. It is a kind of epidemic which every man catches soon after his arrival. Some take it more seriously than others. To a few it has proved fatal. ”

“ Do you know—do you know— ”

Julian felt a sudden stricture in his throat, and was unable to finish his question. It was Crampton's name he had in mind, but he experienced difficulty in uttering it.

Just then the lady with her escort swept by them in the outer vestibule, and Burroughs and the secretary both removed their hats. The latter was rewarded with a smile which was beautiful. It was not radiant, not glaringly cordial, but gently subdued as

was proper to the occasion. A dozen other hats were lifted as she made her progress to the street, and with the same sweet, dignified gentleness she responded to all greetings. Her toilet gave an impression of combined simplicity and richness which challenges description. It was not striking, but in admirable taste, expressing somehow her rare and noble personality in millinery. A short cloak of blue velvet, edged with swan's-down, set off her fine figure to advantage; and a very modish hat with a pale-blue feather gave such an effective outline to her head that it seemed impossible to imagine how she would have looked without it. She seemed to leave a radiant trail behind her. The impression of her loveliness was visible as an illumination in every one's countenance.

"Well," said Merrill, after a ruminating silence, during which they had reached the street, "what do you think of her?"

"You must excuse me," Burroughs answered; "I am not much of a poet."

"Never mind that. I'll be content with prose."

"But you didn't tell me her name."

"Didn't I? Well, her name is Douglas—Constance Douglas."

"And is she an American?"

"Yes, she is; though she was on the wrong side in the war. She is an American *émigrée*, a Europeanized American exile. She holds court in the Palazzo Barberini. If you want an invitation to her Wednesday, I can easily manage it for you."

"Thanks, you are very kind. But such a resolution requires meditation—"

"Yes, meditation and prayer," cried Merrill.

"I'll drop you a note in a day or two."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the secretary, "that is too good. You are duly impressed, I see, with the danger. You pause on the threshold. That's wise, my boy, that's prudent. But it's no good. We all have to worship at that shrine as long as we are tolerated, that is, until we are thrown out into the outer darkness to make room for a new set of worshipers."

CHAPTER XV.

A FATHER CONFESSOR.

AMONG the boarders at Madame Waldbach's was a tall, athletic Englishman, with a small brown mustache, and a clear, bright, rather boyish face. He had been introduced to Julian as Mr. Grantley, and the American had in some indefinable manner derived the impression that he was a captain of dragoons. Though the profession of arms was not particularly congenial to him, he took a great fancy to the young Englishman, and frequently conversed with him on indifferent topics at the table. As there was no one else in Madame Waldbach's *pension* who in the least attracted him, he began to make cautious advances to Mr. Grantley, and finally one day invited him into his rooms for an after-dinner smoke.

The young man accepted with alacrity. There was something almost touching to Burroughs in the way he waived all regard for his own dignity, and yet always appeared manly and dignified.

"It's awfully good of you, you know," he said, as he seated himself in one of Julian's luxurious easy-chairs, "to ask me to come and smoke with you. You know, I have been very lonesome to-day, and I fancy you discovered it."

"My dear captain," the American replied, cordially, "I am afraid you undervalue your own attractiveness. I assure you, I asked you out of pure regard for myself, and with no philanthropic motive whatever."

"Oh, thank you," cried Grantley, accepting the proffered cigar; "but, pray, why do you call me captain?"

"Well, I don't know, unless it is because I supposed you were a captain."

"You are awfully mistaken then, you know. I am a clergyman."

"A clergyman!"

"Yes, precisely."

"That was the last thing I should have suspected you of being."

"You mean because I wear a mustache?"

"No; I don't know that it is the mustache. It is your whole personality. Your bearing, if you will permit me to be personal, is distinctly military."

Mr. Grantley stretched his long legs across the rug toward the fire-place, flung back his head, and laughed.

"I suppose one doesn't easily get rid of that sort of thing," he said; "I served two years in India."

"As a chaplain?"

"No, as ensign."

"Then I was not so far wrong, after all."

"No; you made a shrewd hit, but you don't de-

serve much credit for it. The old Adam sticks in me yet, I fancy, and will have his fling."

Mr. Grantley looked through the cigar-smoke at Burroughs with his friendly blue eyes; the latter met his guileless and candid gaze with unaffected cordiality. He had never encountered a man before whom he had liked so well. There was a kind of cleanness about his whole personality, moral and physical, which was singularly impressive. His great, well-knit, muscular frame had a subtle refinement which made it subordinate to the man himself, and yet somehow contributed to his impressiveness. You could imagine no sordid thing in connection with him. A sense of peace and well-being took possession of Julian as he sat chatting with his new friend, and a vague need to confide in him began to assert itself. Grantley seemed so gentle and helpful. A mild strength beamed from his face when he talked; and he seemed to have an inexhaustible store of it to draw upon in case of need. It was obvious that the liking was mutual, for the talk flowed on with delightful naturalness; and Julian had so vivid a sense of his visitor's good opinion of him that he felt alternately a dim pang of remorse and a stirring of good resolutions.

"I suppose," he began, when the ceremonial stage of the conversation had been passed, "that you know Mr. Norman, who preaches in the Via Nazionale."

"Oh, yes, I know him. He is a good fellow," answered Grantley, "and a capital scholar."

"He is said to be a great judge of tea-cups and rugs and antiquities and things."

"Why don't you say art? He is a great judge of music, painting, sculpture—in fact, of all the arts."

“Except the art of preaching.”

“Now, I say, don’t you be hard on him,” ejaculated Grantley, pushing back his wavy brown hair; “he’s a capital good fellow, and he who listens to him with a desire to be benefited will be benefited. You must pardon me, but I think it is a very obnoxious spirit which demands of the preacher entertainment rather than edification. I have very little patience with the men who stand up, Sunday after Sunday, in their pulpits and deliver neat little intellectual essays on some topic of the time. Let them hire a hall for that purpose. The house of God is not the place for the exhibition of intellectual pyrotechnics.”

There was a ring of earnestness and of simple, unaffected piety in this which roused sympathetic echoes in Julian’s soul. He had never known any one before who introduced religion into ordinary conversation, and though he was anxious to have him continue, he felt a little awkward in handling so unaccustomed a theme. He sat silent for some minutes struggling to overcome this reluctance, and finally leaned forward, his grave eyes alert with interest.

“Perhaps you can answer a question which has long been troubling me,” he said. “How can a man who has groveled in the dust lift himself above and out of his sordid existence, and fill his life with worthier contents?”

“My dear friend,” answered Grantley, heartily, “I have been where you are. I have fought that battle, and am still fighting it. If you will grant me the privilege to help you, I shall be very happy.”

“But I do not believe. I can not believe! I never shall believe,” cried Julian, with deep perturbation.

"I have known all those fairy tales from my childhood, but I have outgrown them. They have lost all power to move me."

"I shall not ask you to commence with believing," Grantley responded, quietly; "you will end by believing."

"It is the life I care for, not the faith," Julian exclaimed, rising and beginning to pace the floor; "it is the horrible, sordid futility of the life I have been leading which makes me shudder and recoil from my own self and writhe with loathing at the recollection of the things in which I have found pleasure. What single redeeming feature is there to an existence which simply wallows in gross indulgence, and for a long time was not even made uncomfortable by the consciousness of its degradation?"

A pensive brilliancy stole into Grantley's eyes as he listened to this passionate outbreak. "You can not have the life without the faith," he said, gently. "It is the faith that sanctifies the life. You may, indeed, be philanthropic and vaguely benevolent without being a Christian. But it will give you little blessing. You can not lead the life of the spirit without the faith in the spirit."

Burroughs was about to reply, but was checked by a knock at the door. A strong displeasure distorted his features, and he had yet made no response when Delia's blonde head appeared between the folds of the *portières*.

"May I come in, cousin Jule?" she asked, cheerfully, and without awaiting his permission, she invaded the room, nodded in acknowledgment of Grantley's bow, and flung herself into a vacant easy-

chair. "I could hear through the door you were having such a good time," she continued, undiscouraged by the coolness of her welcome, "and I was simply being bored to death by one of those deadly women who do fancy-work and consult you about a crochet pattern as if it were a matter of life and death. You needn't scowl, cousin Jule. You can't squelch me in that way, you know. I say what I have got to say, scowl or no scowl. And he is himself the most intolerant person in the world, Mr. Grantley; I mean intolerant of boredom. The trouble with him is that, like most men, he has been made too much of from the time he was born; and that is the reason his father imposed me upon him as a wholesome and chastening discipline. For however disagreeable I am, he can't shake me off, you know."

Mr. Grantley, who was uncertain in what light Miss Saunders was to be regarded laughed uneasily, and seemed to be looking for a convenient moment to make his exit. Delia, however, perceived his intention, and interposed a prompt objection.

"You needn't run away on my account, Mr. Grantley," she said, in her cheerfully patronizing manner; "I won't bite you. Besides, I have a particular reason for wanting you to stay. I want you to tell me something about Mr. Percy, or Mr. Armitage—I never can make out what that man's real name is."

"Sir Percy Armitage."

"All right. Tell me first, now, why he stutters so."

"I wasn't aware that he stutters."

"Well he says *aw—aw*, after every other word he utters. Wouldn't you call that stuttering? But never mind that, tell me something about him."

"Sir Percy, my dear madame, is a rather eccentric gentleman, but kind-hearted and benevolent. He belongs to an old Suffolk family which has always been wealthy, and, I believe, always a trifle eccentric."

"He's awful good fun, any way," ejaculated Delia, with a sudden explosion of laughter, prompted by some comical retrospect.

"He is a person of great position and social and political consequence," observed Mr. Grantley, with an air of mild correction.

"Well, he may be all that, but he does say the funniest things," exclaimed the young lady, with a fresh burst of merriment. "Guess what he said to me to-day, Jule," she continued, addressing herself to her cousin. "We had been driving about doing the churches, and at one place—I've forgotten the name of it—we got into a crowd of frightfully malodorous people, all of whom seemed very devout. Well, Sir Percy, he puffed and fumed and seemed awfully put out. He blew his nose every minute and waved his handkerchief which was scented. But it was all no good. 'Do you know, Miss—aw—Saunders,' he gasped, 'that's what I've got against—aw—Christianity.' 'What?' I asked, 'that some Christians don't bathe? But the heathen, I am told, are not a whit better in that respect.' 'No,' he cried, 'but the—aw—terror of it is that we've got to—aw—love them, unwashed or not. Paganism don't demand—aw—anything so preposterous of us. Even ugly women,' he went on, after a while, 'have—aw—souls to—aw—save; and I suppose it is—aw—true, though I sometimes find it—aw—deucedly hard to believe.' I took him up on that, you may rest assured, and I made him quite unhappy

by affecting to believe that the remark had a personal application. We quarreled all the morning, except when we were inside the churches, and I said so many impertinent things to him that I am sure he'll never want to see or speak to me again."

The situation appeared to her so excessively amusing that she gave vent once more to her mirth, heedless of the fact that both Grantley and her cousin seemed pointedly unsympathetic.

CHAPTER XVI.

A CHANCE ENCOUNTER.

WHY Miss Douglas had not long since married was a much-discussed theme in the foreign colony of Rome. It could not be pretended that she had not had abundant opportunities, many of which, to a rational ambition, would have appeared brilliant. The assertion was sometimes heard that, in her proud elation at her popularity, she had completely lost her head; that she would take nothing less than a duke—nay, perhaps would not scruple to set her cap for royalty. It was ladies, of course, who spoke in this way, for to men the notion that such deep plottings could go on behind Miss Douglas's placidly smiling mask seemed preposterous. Possibly her mother was ambitious; and she had apparently a high regard for her mother. The little old lady did, perhaps, cherish extravagant expectations; but who, being the mother of such a daughter, would not have dreamed dreams and seen

visions? It was very pardonable in Mrs. Douglas to dream even of princes.

But, in the mean while, until the prince should announce himself, Constance Douglas was amusing herself, so the story went, with a ridiculous little canary-colored American. She allowed him to paint her portrait in different costumes and attitudes. She occasionally accepted his escort when she went horseback-riding; and it was told that the young man, when this dazzling prospect came within the range of possibility, had rushed off to a French riding-master and taken lessons, morning, noon, and night, so as not to disgrace himself. He could not be expected to know, poor fellow, that she was only playing him off against Count de Saint-Réault, who, for some reason (it was surmised), had perhaps become a trifle lax in his attentions.

Gossip of this order was retailed daily at Madame Waldbach's dinner-table, and could not fail to make some impression upon Julian Burroughs. He had now allowed two months to pass without seeking the acquaintance of the lady for whose sake he had come to Rome. It seemed incredible to himself that so long a time had elapsed. He was often at a loss to account for his own state of mind. Was it really a sense of his own unworthiness which restrained him? Was it not rather a realization of the tremendous stake he was bound to risk in the game, if once he chose to play? It was like walking up to the Sphinx and demanding its riddle, unsolved as yet, with a beautiful chance of suffering the fate of all his predecessors. His dead friend's face rose warningly out of the dusk with eyes full of anxious forecast. And yet Julian knew all the

while that he was dallying with fate; that in the decisive moment all his scruples and apprehensions would be swept away like cobwebs. A verse from Swinburne's "Atalanta" kept ringing in his brain with nightmarish persistence. It was a kind of possession. He walked to its rhythm, and was powerless to shake it off. There was a fascinating cadence in it and a vague prophecy which seemed to have reference to his own case:

Who shall contend with the gods,
Or cross them or do them wrong?
Who shall bind them as with cords?
Who shall tame them as with song?
Who shall smite them as with swords?
For the hands of their kingdom are strong.

There was another strange thought that haunted him which he would have given much to get rid of. He imagined there was a touch of mystery about Constance Douglas, bright, daylight creature though she appeared to be. It may have been Mr. Endicott Merrill, the secretary of the legation, who was responsible for this fancy; for his comparison of Miss Douglas to a serenely smiling Circe, a beautiful but heartless enchantress, had somehow got a powerful hold upon Burroughs's mind. It was particularly on one occasion that this impression became most vivid, and it had much to do with increasing his reluctance to approach her.

It had occurred to him during one of his visits to the little museum of antiquities and *bric-à-brac* which Crampton had bequeathed to him that it would be a graceful thing, on his part, to mark his friend's grave in the Protestant cemetery with some sort of monu-

ment. He accordingly requested Mr. Marston, a promising American sculptor, to submit some designs to him from which he might make his selection. While he was occupied with this question he paid frequent visits to the cemetery, sometimes on foot, sometimes on horseback. There was something in the solemn immobility of the place which soothed and rested him. The bright, sunlit silence, like a smile in death, the air of desertion and general decay, the historic memories and the venerable decrepitude of the surroundings tuned him into a mood of gentle melancholy and elegiac resignation. He read Crampton's letter, with its enigmatical prophecies, sitting upon the stone slab that covered his dust, and marveled what perverse spirit had prompted him to bequeath the love that had been his own undoing to the friend for whom he professed an affectionate regard. Why project the tragic problem which had wrecked his own life into that of his unsuspecting friend? For it pleased Julian, in this mood, to believe that, without Crampton's letter, the thought of Constance Douglas would never have invaded his mind. He sat for a long while wrestling with these fancies, alternately burning with resolution and despising himself for his irresolution. Then suddenly he heard hoof-beats at the gate and saw two equestrians, a gentleman and lady, dismount and hand their horses to a groom who came clattering up behind them. Julian had no difficulty in recognizing in the trim riding-habit the tall and graceful form of Constance Douglas, and the dapper and animated little figure that danced and pranced about her could be none other than Talbot. It was wonderful how she had acquired that imperial carriage! Her face beamed

with affability; there was not a vestige of *hauteur* in her manner, but yet a certain gentle aloofness—a vague reserve—which showed that, however vivacious she might be outwardly, her heart was profoundly at peace, her innermost self was unagitated. She was stopping now at the graves of Keats and Shelley, which are near the gate, and Burroughs could infer from her companion's lively gestures the theme of their discourse. Julian, who was sitting half-way up the slope toward the wall, sheltered by a clump of cypresses, could not resist the temptation of putting his field-glass (which he always carried on his excursions about the city) to his eyes and watching the ill-assorted couple. Why, under the sun, he reasoned, did she, sublime as she was, waste her sweetness upon this deluded youth, whose hopes she was bound to dash to the ground, as she had done those of nobler hearts before? Was there a fatality which impelled her, in some mysterious way, to act out the law of her being, giving joy and inflicting pain with a divine equanimity, and contemplating with smiling serenity or a mere momentary regret the ruin which she had accomplished?

But as he kept her face in focus, seeing it light up with a smile of exquisite sympathy, in response to some winged word of Talbot, concerning the dead poets, his theory resolved itself into mist that vanished in the sunshine of her presence. He saw her move along the gravel-strewn walks, pausing now at one grave, and now at another, and everywhere Talbot seemed to be equal to the occasion, reaping in that divine smile his reward. There could be no doubt that he succeeded in pleasing her, for she had a very different kind of smile for mere polite acquiescence. But surely it

could not be possible that she was allowing herself to be fascinated by his extravagant talk ! He was clever ; there was no doubt of that. But cleverness was a cheap kind of qualification for so sublime a lot as that to which that presumptuous young harum-scarum was aspiring. A vague pang shot through Julian's breast and settled into an aching pain in the region of the heart. He watched with jealous vigilance the two unconscious promenaders, and discovered in the one a delirious elation, and in the lady a pleased surprise and gracious assent.

They were coming slowly up the slope ; and it occurred to Burroughs that Miss Douglas was intending to pay a visit of sentiment to the grave of the man who had loved her so well as to find life unendurable without her. His heart went out toward her instantly and all his harsh judgments were forgotten. He would in that case remain where he was and shrink no more from the meeting. It was peculiarly fitting that they should meet at Crampton's grave. If Talbot chose not to introduce him—and he was quite equal to that—he would take the risk of introducing himself. They were now pausing at the grave of Goethe's son August, and Talbot was again ready with a lot of information and brilliant paradoxes, which won the obvious approval of the lady. Julian wondered whether she had not (like most society people) been accustomed to very dull conversation, since she found Talbot's intellectual gymnastics so entertaining. That he himself, though not inured to dullness, had but a few months ago found an equal delight in these same acrobatic feats of conversation which now excited his scorn had quite escaped his mind. Nothing could have per-

suaded him at this moment that he had ever regarded Talbot as his friend and prophesied for him a brilliant career.

He sat for fifteen or twenty minutes in a state of agitated expectancy, his heart beating in his throat, while the enchantress threaded her way among the graves, followed by her adorer. Detached phrases of Talbot's talk now and then floated toward him; and they seemed stilted, feverishly extravagant, miraculously odious.

"I sometimes think the silent majority have the best of it," he heard him say; and Julian replied mentally: "Yes, because they can't hear your silly talk."

"Why?" Miss Douglas asked. "Would you like to join it?"

"No," cried Talbot;—"not until—not until—but you will think me the most conceited idiot under the sun if I tell you what is in my mind."

She evidently feared some explosion of sentiment, and therefore did not invite his confidence.

"Well," he ejaculated, "it doesn't matter. You are bound to find out my weaknesses any way. What I was going to say was this: I shall not care to join the innumerable caravan of the dead—until I have taught the world how to paint. Then I'll cheerfully harness my ghostly camel, and seating myself between his humps, with the boundless waste of eternity before me, take passage across the unending desert of death, and doze on forever in profitless inactivity."

"That does not seem a cheerful prospect," remarked Constance.

"No; I grant you I have deserved a better fate; but who can quarrel with the gods? I have often had

a good mind to do so. But I have been debarred by their exclusiveness—their utter unapproachability.”

Burroughs missed the lady's reply to this; and he observed with a sinking heart that she was directing her steps down the slope, and was increasing the distance between them. Was it, perhaps, possible that she had seen him, and fearing the gossip which her sentimental pilgrimage might occasion had desisted from her purpose? She realized, of course, what a conspicuous personage she was, and that her smallest act was subject to conjectural interpretation and comment. Or was it, perhaps, a mere vagrant impulse which had prompted her to explore the beautiful old cemetery; and possibly she did not even know where, within its walls, her unhappy lover was reposing. Burroughs strongly inclined toward the latter theory, as he watched, through the branches, her blithe affability and heard a little snatch of laughter from between the solemn cypress boughs.

The sun was now low, and a great saffron-colored blaze with a faint flush of crimson where it touched the horizon, filled the western sky, fading gradually into the blue of the zenith. Burroughs had, from where he was sitting, a superb view of the darkening plain below, of the pyramid, cutting its black silhouette against the heavens, and the great congregation of towers and domes and jagged line of roofs that caught the rays of the setting sun. The iron railing of the neighboring tomb, and the thick, close-trimmed shrubbery that grew within it, must, in all probability, have shielded him from observation. While he was pondering this probability, the frequent warning of Grantley not to linger in the cemetery after sunset

occurred to him, and he rose somewhat reluctantly, descended the slope, and arrived at the gate just as Talbot and Miss Douglas were cantering away. He swung himself lightly into the saddle, and kept his horse for a while at a respectful distance. But he could not avoid witnessing the continuation of the torturing spectacle which had filled him with wrath in the graveyard. Through the drifting cloud of dust that whirled in their path, he caught glimpses of Talbot's delighted face, as he leaned over to his companion, evidently flattered out of his wits by the graciousness with which his discourse was received. Julian had soon enough of this; and when he could stand it no longer he spurred his horse and dashed ahead; the animal picked up its feet beautifully and dauced away over the road with a lightsome mazurka gait, which none but a practiced horseman on a trained horse could have maintained. And with what a juvenile pleasure this superior young man now put his beast through its paces for the edification of Constance Douglas! How absurdly and blushingly conscious he was of his good looks, of his good seat, of his good horsemanship! And how these advantages soothed his wounded spirits and restored, in a measure, his self-respect! For Talbot, he had been quick to observe, had all he could do in keeping himself in the saddle without grabbing hold of the horse's mane, or secretly holding on to the pommel. For all that, this unheroic figure had, for the moment, the upper hand, and he evidently meant to make the fullest use of his advantage.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE ETERNAL RIDDLE.

It was remarked by the population of the Casa Waldbach that the Reverend Richard Grantley and Julian Burroughs were becoming very intimate. They spent the greater part of each day in each other's company. What particularly attracted the American was the absence of all airs of clerical superiority in his friend. He was a man, as most men are, only wiser, juster, less rash in his judgments, with a sweeter, richer, and mellower keynote to his personality than any one Burroughs had known before. He was a great sportsman, had shot buffaloes on the American prairies and grizzlies in the Rocky Mountains. He could talk of fly-fishing, of beaver-trapping, and of his hunting adventures in the West, with an enthusiasm which seemed at first blush curiously out of keeping with his clerical character. But this same hunter of grizzlies could speak with no less fervor of his labor among the poor, his sense of personal responsibility for the world's ills, and his efforts to stem the rising tide of evil. This combination of breezy manliness with a reverent religious spirit made a profound impression upon Burroughs. Life deepened and widened about him with each day that he spent in Grantley's company. As by slow degrees he gleaned bits of his friend's biography he was filled with something akin to reverence for his character. Here was a university-bred man, of good family, with excellent connections, who chose to throw all his worldly pros-

pects overboard, dwell in the slums and labor unremittingly for the moral elevation of his fellow-men. Julian had never come in contact with so sublime a character, and it naturally aroused in him a desire to consecrate his own life to nobler ends. New influences were astir within him, and new regions of his soul were constantly being opened up under Grantley's guidance. A spirit of renunciation, a longing to assert his powers in some way for the good of humanity, a desire to make existence more endurable for those who suffer, were kindled in his heart. He was very shy at first in dealing with these unwonted impulses, and it was long before he could bring himself to talk of them to Grantley. He was a little disappointed at the reserved way in which the clergyman responded, as if he deprecated his zeal, or questioned its sincerity. But for all that, he soon noticed that he had somehow drawn nearer to him by his confession; there was a new warmth of affection in Grantley's voice when he spoke to him, and a new pleasure in his eyes when they were riveted upon him. A companionship on more equal terms was growing up between them, and it was the more secure and grateful, because it was in their loftiest aspirations and noblest impulses that their sympathy rested. It was in their highest selves they were united, not in a mere superficial regard or a chance community of likes and dislikes.

It was early in March, when the Carnival week was far advanced, that an incident occurred which aroused Julian in an unpleasant manner to his responsibilities in regard to his cousin Miss Saunders. She had always been accustomed to walk her own way, and she seemed about as hopeful a subject for discipline

as a grasshopper. Julian, though he had in a general way charged himself with her welfare, had never attempted to exert any restraining influence upon her, because he knew that such an attempt would end in conflict, and probable rupture between them. All he knew at present was that Delia was spending a good deal of her time in the company of the English baronet Sir Percy Armitage, who professed to find her immensely clever, and that she was, to all appearances, having a capital time. He suspected, too, that she was making notes for a future volume, for she usually shut herself up in the evenings in her room and wrote in her diaries. She displayed an unquenchable thirst for knowledge and zeal in its pursuit, was discouraged at no obstacles, used her acquaintances, *sans cérémonie*, with a cheerful assurance, and ignored the limits which society prescribes for the enterprise of her sex. She was bound to see all there was to see; she meant to study life in all its phases, regardless of idiotic conventions; and no power on earth, she declared, could restrain her in her explorations. It was these stupid, old-fashioned precepts about women not doing this and not doing that which were responsible for woman's ignorance, superficiality, and consequent degradation. Delia, therefore, set out in the true spirit of a reformer, to trample upon these ancient prohibitions in the hope of thereby breaking their force forever.

The accident by which her explorations were brought to Julian's notice came about in the following manner: He had been spending the evening with a bronze-worker in the Via Margutta, of whom he had ordered a copy of the beautiful torso of Cupid (known as *il genio del Vaticano*), and was slowly wending his

way homeward, when he met Grantley, who was starting out on a nocturnal promenade. Burroughs knew that the Protestant mission with which his friend was connected frequently demanded his services by night, and was therefore in nowise astonished at their meeting.

"Where are you going, Grantley?" he asked. "Don't you want to take me along?"

"Well, why not?" Grantley responded, as if the proposition suddenly struck him in a favorable light. "The fact is," he continued, putting his arm through Julian's, "I am going on an errand of mercy. An old English artist, who is living here in very straitened circumstances, came to see me last night about his daughter, a girl of eighteen, who, it appears, has gone astray. She had an Italian mother, this wayward Nina, and I suspect she found the venerable jog-trot of her old father's household rather too dull for her fiery Southern blood. And, day before yesterday, she took it into her head to disappear. It is a most pitiful case. She has broken her father's heart. I have a clew to-night by which to go, and it will lead us into rather queer places."

"You know her then by sight?" queried Julian, deeply interested.

"Oh, yes, I know her well; but I have very little hope of benefiting her. She has a strain of pure savagery in her blood, and I fear she is predestined for mischief."

"If it is a case of destiny, why not, then, let her alone?"

"No; we have no right to abandon any one. God is stronger than any destiny."

"But is he not destiny? Or what destiny can there be apart from him?"

"Ah, my dear boy, it is a tremendous conundrum you are propounding there; it kept me in a state of feverish unrest for three miserable years, during which I gave myself up as lost."

"And what was your conclusion?"

"My conclusion? To be frank, I arrived at no rationally satisfactory conclusion. I was born a doubter; I wrestled with the Lord, like Jacob, from the time I was a mere lad. I wished to compel him to bless me."

"And did he bless you?"

"He did, at last."

"Would you mind telling me how? I am deeply interested."

"I will gladly tell you. I had associated much with agnostics, and was one myself. My father was an enthusiastic unbeliever, and I was brought up in his ideas. But during my army life, the horrible futility of all I did began to haunt me like a nightmare. The dreary barrenness, the sordid, hopeless earthiness of the philosophy I professed oppressed me so that I could scarcely breathe. The heavens were like brass above my head, and the earth beneath my feet a devouring monster, which, in cruel mockery, sent us forth with a chain about our feet, deluded us with hopes of immortality, like rainbow-colored soap-bubbles that dance in the sun, which, when we tried to catch them, proved as unsubstantial. The lives of my agnostic friends, when I came to regard them critically, seemed narrow, sordid, and selfish, devoid of ideality and higher outlook. They were, as a rule, intellectual men, and given to no vices; interested in

what they called the world's progress, but humanity's woe did not touch them ; they were content to let the unfit perish, like vermin, and were disposed to congratulate the survivors on their improved chances, on account of the diminishing of their burden. And what appeared to me the most glaring inconsistency—they failed to see that, according to their own philosophy, this frame of mind involved the gradual loss of that altruism which they professed to regard as the net result and outcome of civilization—the gauge of humanity's progress, the beautiful fruit of the tree of life. There is something brutalizing (which I distinctly felt in my own case) in shutting one's eyes and ears to the world's woe, feeling no responsibility for it, and calmly accepting that relentless process of the elimination of the unfit which we think Nature has wisely adopted. I may be fighting against Nature to-day, retarding, perhaps, the predominance of the fittest ; and if so, my work may in the end prove futile. But if God made all these suffering, erring, miserable fellow-creatures of mine, what right have I, with my narrow, temporal vision, to decide that they are unfit, and let them perish for want of a helping hand from me ? ”

They had during this discourse strolled down the Via Fontanella, crossed the Corso and the Ripetta, and were approaching the Ponte di San Angelo. In the Via Tordinone, which winds along the river-front, they met a straggling company of maskers whose tawdry finery fluttered in the wind, and whose false hilarity re-echoed with a mocking distinctness in the silent street. The great humid, weather-beaten house-fronts rose like hoary ghosts out of the dusk, staring out of their cavernous windows at the vener-

able Tiber who yet tosses his tawny mane against the pallid beams of the moon. The merry-makers pushed rudely against the two promenaders, and sent a couple of handfuls of *confetti* flying into their faces. One young girl, in the character of Columbine, stepped forward and asked pertly if the *signori forestieri* would not join them and have some sport.

"Not this time, my child," answered Grantley, in fluent Italian; and going closer to the girl, he put his hand gently on her arm, and said, with impressive seriousness: "I want you to go home now. This is not the time for a young girl to be on the street."

"Pardon me, *eccellenza*," replied the girl, dropping a deep courtesy; "I did not know *eccellenza* was a priest."

She bade her companions a hasty, shamefaced good-bye, and hurried up the street, while they stood and gazed after her in sheepish wonder.

"I can not quite consent to drop our discussion yet," began Burroughs, as they resumed their walk. "I should like to ask you what was the decisive influence which impelled you to give up your career and live the life you are now leading?"

"The influences I have already mentioned; a conviction that the Christian life, whatever its imperfections, is a nobler, more useful, and exalted one, than the career I abandoned?"

"Nothing else?"

Grantley paused for a moment and looked sharply at his friend, just as they plunged into the shadow of a tall, half-ruined building.

"I know what is in your mind," he said, smiling gravely; "you imagine that some romantic incident, some bitter disappointment, the rejection of my love

by some one I had set my heart on, or something of that sort was required to arouse me from my torpor. That, I admit, is what usually happens in novels. In my case there was no such motive."

"Pardon me, if I seem importunate, but tell me, how did you get faith all at once, being an unbeliever?"

"I did not get faith all at once. I am not even now sure that I am in any sense orthodox. But this passage of Scripture came to my help: 'If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it is of God, or whether I speak of myself.' How could I, being wholly carnal, having never lived the life of the spirit, hope for any sudden illumination enlightening me concerning the ways of God toward man? I determined to do his will, according to the best of my ability, accepting his promise, and trusting that in his good time he will grant me light."

They walked along silently for some minutes, and entered the Ponte Sisto, which leads into that very plebeian quarter, called the Trastevere. They paused, as by common consent, in the middle of the bridge, and stared at the hurrying river, the ancient yellow Tiber which "flows by the walls of Rome." The evening star stood big and splendid over the dome of St. Peter's, and out of the deep spaces of the sky hosts of stars trembled forth into view, as they gazed into the blue expanse. There was a warm spring dampness in the air, and vague pungent odors which stirred lawless impulses in the blood. The huddled dilapidated buildings of the Trastevere, turning their greenish-black rears toward the river, had a gaunt austerity which the moonlight scarcely mellowed. It seemed a very solemn moment to Julian; a question

hovered upon his lips which he hardly had the courage to ask. He knew he had been sounding the depths of his friend's soul. But there was yet something vital which he yearned to know.

"I can not stop where you have left me, Grantley," he said, with tremulous intensity. "May I go on?"

"By all means, speak what is in your heart."

"Have you found the light for which you hoped? Do you feel sure of everything now?"

"No, I do not. Only of this I feel sure, that I am on the right way. But I have a long road before me to travel yet. Probably I shall never reach certainty. But God meant it to be so. I see more than I did, and I am conscious of a constant spiritual growth. Christ did not come to bring the peace of certainty, but the sword of doubt and struggle and victory and defeat; of stormy ascent and anxious groping in the dark, and faint and far glimpses of beatitude. Aspiration, though with the condition of erring and failing, is the proof of spiritual vitality."

"If there was any one whom you loved, would you advise him to choose the road that you have chosen?"

"Yes, dear friend; yes, and a thousand times yes, if I believed him strong enough to fight the battles which I have fought."

As he spoke these words he grasped both Julian's hands with fervor, and gazing up toward the sky held them long in his.

"God bless you," he murmured, reverently, "and have you in his keeping."

From beyond the river wild shouts of revelry were heard, snatches of song, and bursts of rollicking laughter.

CHAPTER XVIII.

STRAYING SHEEP.

THE two friends paused before a low, rambling building, looking somewhat like a circus tent. Two sides of it were made of massive stone walls belonging to some ancient ruin which had been partly excavated and the rubbish removed, and the two other sides consisted of a wooden clapboarding of the flimsiest character. Rows of colored lanterns hung in festoons under the eaves, and from within came the strains of music and a mingled confusion of clatter of heels, cries of venders, and noisy hilarity. Grantley stepped up to the ticket-office and bought two tickets, which gave right of admission to a box in the low tier which surrounded the dancing-hall. He mounted the creaking stairs rapidly, followed by Julian. The spectacle which greeted them as they took their seats in the box was not edifying. On the floor below some three or four hundred people, a majority of whom were women, were whirling about with a kind of wild, bacchantic frenzy, of which we of Germanic blood can have no conception. All who participated in the dance were in fancy costumes, while the occupants of the boxes were in ordinary attire. There were harlequins and columbines in great number, with gaudy garments of a kind of cheap glazed stuff; there were hump-backed pulcinellos with enormous noses, red tights, and slashed sleeves; and there were predatory black dominoes of quiet demeanor, who stood with observant eyes along the walls, on the alert for adventures, or prome-

naded with the prettiest *contadinas*. It was these apparently inoffensive persons who aroused Grantley's wrath. "A spectacle like this," he said, with a voice quivering with indignation, "makes one feel how thin the glaze of civilization is in this vaunted nineteenth century; how strong the beast is yet in man; how the brutal passions lie in ambush, ready to leap forth undisguised, as soon as the artificial restraints are relaxed."

Julian did not answer, but sat leaning out over the balustrade of the box. He had seen such scenes before, not once, but many times; and he had even participated in them. He understood perfectly the attitude of those gentlemanly black dominoes who hovered on the outskirts of the crowd, and out of his memory started a pack of sharp-fanged regrets like savage hounds, and tore his self-esteem into a thousand shreds. He knew nothing of the luxurious sense of religious humility in which so many devotees revel. He knew only the pain of remorse and the shame and degradation which stuck like poisoned arrows in his flesh. The thought flitted through his brain that he must have undergone a great change, since the scene now filled him with emotions so different from those which, but half a year ago, would have been uppermost, and he derived a slight comfort from this reflection. He glanced sideward at Grantley's earnest face, and read in its every line and feature the noble spirit which animated the man. He felt like clutching him, clinging to him, confiding in him, and never departing from his side. The clergyman feeling his gaze turned toward him and remarked:

"I see no trace as yet of my lost lamb. But I am

convinced she is here. I hope you won't get impatient, old man, if I keep you till morning. I am bound to see this thing through, and I may need your help, in case I get into rows—as I am not unlikely to do.”

He pulled a couple of cigars out of his pocket, and handed one to Burroughs.

“Smoke,” he said, encouragingly; “it'll do you good. It is a light, harmless, and well-flavored weed.”

Julian accepted the cigar with a nod, and lighted it, after having offered his match-box to Grantley. It was wonderful how two or three puffs blunted the keenness of his regrets and relaxed the tensivity of his nerves. The orchestra was tuning up, with a prelude of confused discords, for the next dance, and there was a great commotion on the floor, while each masker was trying to find a partner or to penetrate the *incognito* of the one he had found. A number of flower-girls and venders of lottery tickets were circulating through the crowd, crying at the tops of their voices, and screams of pure wantonness rose here and there above the general turmoil, when some gay youth and maiden exercised somewhat audaciously the privileges of their *incognito*. When the preliminary eddying of the throng had ceased and all had found their places, the fiddles and the clarionets broke into a slow, rhythmical wail, and the maskers began to move to and fro, quickening their movements in sympathy with the quickening *tempo*. They advanced and receded, with expressive gestures, in long rows; now and then a dancer seized his fair partner about the waist and lifted her above his head—a feat which was always greeted with tremendous hilarity—and occasionally the fair partner playfully touched the nose of her *vis-à-vis* with the tip of her

dainty toe or lifted the fringe of a black mask with the same convenient member. All order gradually ceased, and each couple danced according to its own sweet will, leaping, shrieking, laughing, and shouting, but yet keeping time in their motions with the hurrying music and flinging their bodies about with dithyrambic abandonment and impetuosity. It reminded one of the time when the wildly beautiful Bacchante, with unloosed garments and disheveled locks, smote the earth with rhythmic feet, and the cry, "*Evoë Bacchus*," re-echoed through Tempe and the vales of Arcady.

It was while this frenzied abandonment was at its height, that Julian noticed an unusual commotion at the door right under the box in which he was sitting, and to his unutterable amazement saw his cousin Delia walk, with her cool and *degagé* air, into the midst of the surging crowd, leaning upon the arm of Sir Percy Armitage. The latter wore evening dress and a tall hat, and looked as if he had come from a dinner party; while Delia was arrayed in an ordinary brown walking-costume, a light wrap, and a rakish hat, adorned with a crimson bird that seemed to be bristling with pugnacity. She did not appear to be in the least disturbed by the license of demeanor which prevailed about her, but with an expression of scientific interest put on her eyeglasses, and began to make her observations. Sir Percy, on the other hand, seemed to be a good deal annoyed, and picked his way through the crowd, at first cautiously and critically, as if he objected to be bumped, and when his warning frowns produced no effect, he grew very red in the face and flashed about him imperious glances of indignation.

He stopped repeatedly and spoke in a tone of remonstrance to his companion, but she declared laughingly that this was the very thing she had wanted to see ever since she came to Italy, and that, if he left her, she would remain any way; it reminded her so of a scene in "The Marble Faun"; and there was also something like it in "Corinne." She did not mean to submit to his arrogant masculine dictation; and if he was afraid to stay, they might exchange *rôles*, and she would protect him. There was not the faintest *soupçon* of ill-temper in this declaration, but rather a spirit of friendly banter which had become the customary tone between them. But they were not aware either of them that, as they were standing there disputing in the middle of the floor, they were the most conspicuous couple in the whole assembly, and the target of countless witticisms. They were intentionally knocked and bumped from pillar to post, and as they took no hints (though they were made plain enough), they found themselves suddenly surrounded by a ring of maskers, who circled madly about them, shouting and screaming and kicking up their heels. Sir Percy was so astonished to see his dignity thus lightly treated that he blushed purple, and taking Delia by the hand plunged forward and strove by force to break through the ring. But he could not. A peal of uproarious laughter greeted the clumsy attempt. Wildly and more wildly the dancers whirled about him. Even Delia began to be annoyed. She looked to the right and to the left for a means of escape. For an instant the ring broke, but was as quickly again reattached, and four lightly arrayed sylphs pirouetted forward into the open space, and, holding up their short skirts with dainty fingers,

hovered about Sir Percy with the most bewitching glances flashing from behind their masks. He stood, red and explosive, and stared at them in wrathful bewilderment. Then, quick as a flash one of them wafted past him and with the tip of her toe knocked off his hat; the second one deftly caught the hat on her foot and sent it flying toward the ceiling, and when again it descended it received another upward impulse, which landed it in some unknown region, outside the ring. The discomfiture of its owner was pitiful to behold. He looked as if he were going to have an apoplectic fit. And all the while the wild dancers whirled about him roaring with laughter; while even Delia (as soon as she had convinced herself that the fun was good-natured) could scarcely refrain from joining in their mirth. The four teasing sylphs, encouraged by these evidences of approval, made renewed advances, and when their victim, beside himself with anger, tried again to break away, they seized him by both hands and swung him about in a dizzying whirl, pausing now and then to make importunate demonstrations of tenderness which were indignantly repelled. Each advance and repulse was greeted with equal delight by the crowd; and even the galleries which had hitherto been neutral now resounded with noisy laughter. It was as good as an old-fashioned comedy. It is doubtful how long it would have lasted and what the end of it would have been, if two men had not elbowed their way through the multitude and come to the rescue of the involuntary actors. These men were Grantley and Julian Burroughs. But when they reached the scene of the late comedy, neither Sir Percy nor Delia was to be seen. Grantley stood, like a spirited horse, with dilated

nostrils and lustrous eyes spying in all directions. Suddenly he caught a glimpse of two flushed faces and disheveled locks that were swiftly gyrating in a kind of involuntary *cancan*. Wherever they turned, fresh hands took hold of them and whirled and dragged and swung them, until they panted and gasped and nearly wept with wrath and exhaustion. To dart forward, push the crowd apart and release the breathless prisoners was but a moment's work. Derisive jeers and a rain of vulgar witticisms were heard on all sides, but no demonstration of hostility was attempted. Sir Percy, still trembling with rage, was breathing threats and curses while he allowed the clergyman to pilot him out. Delia, on the other hand, had swiftly recovered her equanimity, and was now endeavoring to give the impression that she had had a delightful time.

"It was awful good fun," she panted, smoothing her disordered hair, and contemplating the wreck of her hat which she carried in her hand; "now I can really say that I have danced a tarantella."

"I wouldn't brag of it, if I were you," said her cousin, with warning gravity; "I shall have more to say to you on the subject when we get home."

"Oh, no, pray, go ahead now," she cried, with forced levity; "I am just in a mood for it."

"I shall go and see our minister at once," wheezed Sir Percy, when they had reached the outer vestibule; "I wonder—aw—I wonder if—aw—an English gentleman—is to be—aw—outraged and insulted—with—aw—impunity—."

A coughing fit here interrupted the threatening discourse, and as soon as it was over Grantley assisted him in arranging his disordered toilet. With the

aid of a pocket-comb and glass he disposed his straggling hair so as to cover the bald spot on his crown, and out of a red silk handkerchief, the four corners of which he tied into knots, he improvised a cap. "I want you to understand, Grantley," he said, while engaged in these operations, "that it was—simply—aw—to accommodate this—aw—young lady—that I consented to enter this infernal place. She wanted to see—aw—Italian folk-life and that—sort of thing. But if I had known what kind—aw—of folk-life it was I was taking her to see—I'll be blasted if I had—aw—ever consented."

"But why didn't you take a box and look at the dancing, as so many others do?" asked Grantley; "nobody ever thinks of going in on the floor without being in costume."

"What did I know about their—aw—blasted customs?" ejaculated the baronet, with unwonted fluency. "I didn't even know there were—aw—boxes."

Having recovered his breath sufficiently and repaired his self-esteem, Sir Percy, with grudging politeness, assisted Miss Delia into the *fiacre* which had been waiting for them outside, and took his seat at her side.

"Sorry I can't offer you a seat, gentlemen," he called to his rescuers, as the cabman drove off.

He spoke scarcely a word to Delia until he deposited her at the entrance to the Waldbach *pension* on the Piazza di Spagna.

CHAPTER XIX.

"THOU SHALT RENOUNCE, ABSTAIN, REFRAIN."

TAKING Julian by the arm, Grantley rapidly re-entered the dancing-hall. There was a pause in the dance, and the cries of the venders of lottery tickets rose again shrilly above the shuffle of feet and the hum of conversation.

"I have discovered my lost lamb," said the clergyman. "She was the one who knocked Sir Percy's hat off with her toe."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Tolerably sure. I watched her through my opera-glass, and I discovered at her throat the cameo-pin of the young Augustus which her father gave her on her birthday, a year ago. And then the build, the hair, and the way the head was set upon the shoulders were unmistakably hers."

He pushed ruthlessly on while he spoke, his fine head looming above the crowd, and his fearless gaze peering with a frown of concentrated energy into every face that passed him.

"But will she not know you?" queried Julian, aroused into sympathy with the adventurous undertaking.

"Oh, yes, of course. But she will not dream that I am here on her account, nor will she imagine that I could penetrate her *incognito*."

He had scarcely uttered the last syllable when he made a dash forward, and seizing a masked damsel by the arm, said :

"Gabriella, I want you to come home with me to your father."

There was something in his boldness and his imposing size, as also in the vibrating earnestness of his voice which made an impression upon the girl and appealed to her better nature. She stood for a moment vacillating, looking away over the heads of the maskers, as if afraid to meet his eye. But suddenly she received a signal from a tall black domino that stood leaning against the wall. She aroused herself, turned resolutely about, and said in fluent Italian :

"You are mistaken, signore. I am not the one you are looking for. I have made no appointment with you for to-night."

She gave a pert little laugh as she swung about upon her heel, having delivered herself of this Parthian arrow. But her glance was uneasy, and she was at evident pains to terminate the interview.

"You can not deceive me, child," retorted Grantley, in a voice full of tender pity. "Come with me. Your poor father is broken-hearted. He has sent me to find you."

"But I assure you," ejaculated the girl, with forced hilarity, "that you are mistaken. I wish you'd let me go now, and not make a fuss, or we might both be arrested. This new police, you know, are terribly particular."

"How could you understand me if you were not Gabriella?" asked the clergyman, in a tone of sorrowful remonstrance. "I have spoken English to you, and you have answered me in Italian. So, let us talk no more about that. The question is, will you come home to your father or will you live a life of sin and

load the guilt of his death upon your soul? Can you afford to make such a choice, *Gabriella mia*?"

The music again struck up a tune full of rollicking mirth, rising to a tumultuous bacchantic exultation. "Oh, let me go, let me go, Mr. Grantley," she cried, impatiently, in English. "It is true, I am Gabriella; but I don't want to go home to my father and wash dishes for him and run errands and die slowly of sheer boredom. I have had enough of that, Mr. Grantley. If my father had loved me so dearly, as you say he does, he ought to have exerted himself a little to amuse me. But he never thought of me and I was always to think of him. That may have been very pleasant for him, but it was not a bit amusing to me."

"But you know your father is poor, Gabriella."

"Yes, he is poor; and why is he poor? Well, because he insists upon pleasing himself in painting as in everything else. He paints just what he likes himself and what nobody else likes. He calls that high principle in art. Well, if that is high principle, then give me less principle and more money. Then he won't associate with anybody; because he is too proud, he says, to associate with those who are better off than himself; and he is too proud, too, to associate with those who are poorer. And so I might just as well have been in a convent or in jail. I am done with that now, Mr. Grantley, and I won't go back."

She gave a toss of her pretty head and tried to pull her arm away from him, but he held her with a grip of steel.

"One moment, Gabriella," he begged, earnestly; "I have still something to say to you."

She was making appealing signals with her eyes to the black domino, who now half reluctantly came forward, shielded by his *incognito*. He was a tall, finely grown man, with an unmistakably military bearing, small ears, and a sunburned neck, covered with short-clipped brown hair which showed a tendency to curl.

"I wish you would let this young lady alone," he said in halting and glaringly foreign Italian; "I don't see what authority you have over her."

"Unmask, you scoundrel," muttered Grantley, stepping close up to him with clenched teeth, "and I'll tell you my opinion of you. And unless you peg away pretty quickly," he added, with a wholly mundane wrath, "I'll undertake to expedite your movements in a way that you won't like."

He looked so superb as he stood there, with his head lifted high, challenging the big black domino that Gabriella could not suppress a thrill of admiration. It was in vain that she darted frowning and encouraging glances at her cavalier; he was obviously afraid of compromising himself, and Grantley with his masterful ways who was afraid of nothing had in that respect the advantage of him. They would by this time have attracted attention and gathered a crowd if the dance had not been resumed, and each couple, intent upon their own adventure, were charitably blind toward those of their neighbors. It was only Burroughs who became the object of tender persecution on the part of some sportive damsels, who were, however, soon discouraged by his failure to respond to their overtures. He had retired a little from the group of which Gabriella was the center, and stood leaning against one of the wooden pillars

which supported the gallery. But as he saw his friend step up in that pugnacious manner to the black domino, he thought that perhaps it would be prudent to assert himself a little, so as to add the weight of his presence to Grantley's argument.

"I warn you to keep off strange preserves," he heard the domino threaten in the same halting Italian; and it struck him at once that it was a voice he had heard before. There was a youthful, resonant quality in it, and yet a certain nasal twang in its pronunciation of the Roman tongue. The unsuccessful attempt to disguise it had only emphasized its peculiar Gallic inflections.

Grantley, still holding the girl by the arm, his unflinching gaze fixed upon the masked cavalier, was evidently struggling to identify the voice.

"Isn't that Count de Saint-Réault?" he asked, turning to Burroughs who was at his elbow. Julian nodded affirmatively. The domino gave a visible start as the name Saint-Réault was pronounced.

"Are you ready, sir," Grantley continued, advancing another step with his great challenging front, "to take the consequences of this act of yours? It matters not now whether you unmask or not. I will unmask you—never you doubt that—before all the world. I'll undertake to make such cowardly deeds as this one of yours as risky as they are contemptible."

"My dear sir," replied the accused nobleman, resuming his natural voice, "aren't you rather jumping at conclusions? What have I done to give you the right to abuse me in this style?"

"What have you done? What have you done?" repeated Grantley, in a tone of deep contempt. "Well,

it wouldn't surprise me if you were sneak enough to try and wriggle out of it."

"I have simply taken this lady's part, and tried to protect her against your unwarrantable presumption."

"None of that, young man, none of that! I warn you," Grantley broke forth, with the peremptory voice and manner of his dragoon days, "don't talk such stuff to me."

The girl, who had stood in a pose of spirited expectancy, flashing her vivid glances at the young man, became now suddenly aware that he was beating a retreat.

"What did you say, Signor Conte?" she asked, quietly removing her mask, and showing a handsome, passionate face, pale with excitement.

The count again started at the sound of his title, and seemed by some kind of ocular telegraphy to be trying to establish a private understanding. But she obviously scorned such underhand dealings, and demanded again, with fierce intensity, "Count de Saint-Réault, what did you say?"

"I said that I'd be blasted if I submit to this insolent behavior. What has this clerical monsieur to do with you or with me?"

Perceiving that they were beginning to attract unpleasant attention, they moved slowly down the hall in the space reserved for promenaders, between the pillars of the gallery and the wall. The scene, therefore, lost much of its dramatic impressiveness, and each of the actors restrained his manner so as to avoid exciting remark. Only Grantley experienced difficulty in curbing his aggressiveness, and it was with a fine ring of indignation that he answered: "Wherever a

wrong is done to one who is weak and defenseless there it is my business to interfere. I mean now to take up the fight with you, and I shall not be done with you, until I have meted out a punishment commensurate with the offense."

The count made no reply to this threat, and avoided meeting Gabriella's appealing glances. He knew perfectly well what Grantley could do to worry and annoy him, and he did not deceive himself as to the extent either of his will or his power. It was especially his acquaintance with Constance Douglas which made him formidable; for she was not free from Anglo-Saxon prejudice in questions of this sort, and might, in case she were informed, choose to make herself disagreeable. The more the count thought of it, the more reluctant he became to engage in a fight with the stalwart clergyman. But he could not afford to pocket an affront. His sensitive Gallic pride urged him to retaliate.

"M. le Curé," he said, in his toploftiest manner, "you take advantage of your cloth to be insulting. You are aware that gentlemen of your profession can not be called to account like other mortals."

The music, after some tremendous flourishes, ceased with the abruptness of a pistol-shot. The crowd surged toward the excited group and swept them apart. And, as it happened, the count was pushed toward the wall, while Gabriella and Grantley were propelled toward the middle of the hall. The young girl, standing on tiptoe, sent anxious glances in all directions, while clinging to the clergyman's arm. Could it be possible that her lover had deserted her?

"I wish you'd let me go, Mr. Grantley," she begged, with a quiver in her voice.

"Yes, you may go, if you like," he answered; "but, Gabriella, what do you think your mother would have said of this, if she had been alive?"

"It would not have happened, then," whispered the girl, tremulously.

"Well, she is alive—though she is dead. She sees you, Gabriella. Can you afford to do for your own pleasure what would have caused—nay, will cause her grief?"

The girl avoided his glance and looked away over the crowd, but he saw the tears gather in her eyes and slowly roll down her cheeks. A little twitching of her upper lip showed what it cost her to preserve this outward calm. The Italian part of her nature seethed and surged and threatened to burst out in a storm of tears, but her English self restrained her. She allowed Grantley, without resistance, to lead her to the door. But as she crossed the threshold into the vestibule, her footsteps slackened, and she paused for a moment and with kindling animation surveyed the ball-room. Grantley urged her on. As the green baize doors swung to behind her the interest suddenly died out of her face.

With a still and stony listlessness, she allowed herself to be wrapped up and put into a *fiacre*. Burroughs, not wishing to intrude, hired another vehicle to convey him home, and took leave of Grantley as he was about to seat himself at the young girl's side. He saw her lean back with a deadly weariness. She looked so young, so tender, and so cruelly wounded. All the pity in his heart went out toward her, and a

keen sympathy with Grantley's indignation against her betrayer quivered through his nerves. Admiringly he watched his friend as with a tender, paternal touch he tucked in the robe about his charge and gazed with an exquisite compassion at her wearily relaxed form.

How marvelous, indeed, Julian thought, as he rattled away over the pavement, that such strength, such imperious will could dwell side by side in the same man with such tenderness, such delicacy of feeling, such divine compassion. He had never before encountered so exalted a spirit in any human being. His friend was two years younger than himself, and scarcely looked more than twenty-five. Nevertheless, he asserted himself not only with the force of a dominant personality, but with a kind of higher authority in which there was a touch of inspiration—consecration. And yet he was simplicity itself in daily intercourse; jolly, good-natured, a trifle boisterous at times, and almost boyish in his relish of a joke. He had cheerfully renounced all that the world holds precious, but never thought for an instant of claiming any credit for his sacrifice. An ardent desire to emulate him began to stir in the depth of Julian's soul. He, too, had much to give up. But could he, by following Grantley's example, be sure of gaining that serene confidence and faith to which Grantley had attained? Was there any inherent virtue in renunciation? Would it alone suffice to dignify and elevate his life into a sphere of purer thought and nobler motives than those which now animated him? If so, he felt in this moment that he was equal to the sacrifice. To strip his existence of all false show and flimsy ornament, to dedicate his wealth to philanthropi-

cal enterprises—"to burn what he once used to worship, and worship what he once used to burn"—of all this and more he was capable. But the final, the crucial test was not in these things. Could he renounce also the hope which had brought him to Rome, the hope which he had so long caressed in thought, which had given a new value to life, at a time when he was sunk into the deepest slough of despond. It seemed a very unsubstantial thing to renounce—the mere baseless fabric of a dream, a fantastic hallucination, perhaps, with not a shadow of fact to support it. The question, Why should he renounce it? scarcely occurred to him. In the ascetic frame of mind into which he had wrought himself, a great and adequate sacrifice seemed the only test of sincerity. How could any one lead a life of renunciation at Constance Douglas's side, when each breath, each glance, each touch would be an intoxication of bliss? In an instinctive way he classed her with the glory of this world which somehow leadeth to destruction. All the sweet florescence of life, the throbbing and blooming flesh, "the laurel, the palm, and the pæan, the breasts of the nymphs in the brake"—all the beautiful, forbidden things clustered about her image, and made her to his yearning fancy the very type and personification of that which would debar him from the realm in which Grantley dwelt. "Thou shalt abstain, renounce, refrain," that is the message of Christianity, and Burroughs resolved after a fierce struggle to obey the difficult behest.

CHAPTER XX.

A DISGUISED COMPLIMENT.

DELIA was sitting at her writing-table, scribbling away with ferocious speed, and flinging each wet sheet, as it was finished, on the floor. The rug all around her was covered with large square half-sheets, scrawled all over with irregular, boldly slanting, inky hieroglyphics. Now and then she paused in her labor, cocked her head and smiled delightedly at her reflection in the looking-glass, which exhibited a halo of blonde horns, like a pre-Raphaelite saint. Occasionally, when one of the curl-papers relaxed its hold upon some yellow lock, she gave it a twist, and fell to work with renewed energy. She wore a loose blue cashmere wrapper with a lace cascade; and her foot, which sometimes tapped the floor in impatience when the ideas got into a snarl, was neatly shod, for Delia prided herself on her neatness, and was especially particular as to her foot gear. She could see no reason, she averred, why women of intellect, who devoted their lives to higher things than babies and tittle-tattle, should not dress as well as anybody—or at least as well as their means permitted. She had no patience with dowdy women—unless they had a grievance against tyrant man—which, happily, most of them had.

It was not only as regards her attire that Delia was well contented with herself. She had also a sublime faith in her literary gift. She wrote a kind of slam-bang “halliballoo” style, full of smart hits, which she had found effective in lecturing. An implicit trust

in the genuineness of her inspiration urged her on with a headlong speed; and as her supply of language was simply inexhaustible, she was equal to literary feats which few of her contemporaries could have rivaled. This fatal fluency of hers was, in fact, one of her chief boasts; and she did not hesitate in interviews with reporters to compare her literary methods with those of the most famous authors of the day. She did this, not with offensive self-assertion, but with cheerful innocence, because she lacked all perception of the distance which separated her from them. You might call her conceited, and feel that, after all, the term did her injustice. If she did overvalue herself (though, in such a case, she may, indeed, herself have been the best judge), she did it with an amusing frankness and self-sufficiency which made no apologies and offended no one's sensibilities. It was like a breath of fresh air from the free and untrammelled West. It seemed a racial rather than a personal characteristic.

In spite of her ability and the voluminous correspondence she was carrying on, Delia had had scant success with the emancipation waist. "The benighted women of Italy are too content with the masculine yoke under which they are groaning," she wrote to the central agency in New York, "to desire either physical or spiritual emancipation." In Germany she had, in response to advertisements, enlisted the interest of a few rebellious spinsters, some of whom had consented to act as agents in the cities where they lived. These she idealized, after her usual fashion, found them possessed of all sorts of remarkable qualities, and addressed to them voluminous epistles, which brought equally voluminous replies.

But Delia's mission was, for all that, a hard one. It was a slow and up-hill work, at best, and any one less sanguine than she was would have lost heart.

The labor to which she was applying her versatile genius on the morning after her nocturnal escapade had, however, nothing to do with the emancipation waist. She was writing an account of the night's adventure for her forthcoming book on Italy, entitled "Under Crown and Miter." She wrote with a zest of which she had rarely before been conscious; for here she felt confident she had secured delightfully fresh and novel material. She had penetrated into the actual life of the people. She meant incidentally to expose a great social evil. She would call a spade a spade, and not shrink from speaking boldly, no matter whom she hurt. She was just luxuriating in the power of her pen to hurt, when the chambermaid entered and handed her a card bearing a coronet and the name Sir Percy Armitage, Bart. With a frown of annoyance she looked up and received the paste-board. It was extremely inconvenient at that moment to interrupt her writing. But Sir Percy was so good a friend that she could scarcely refuse to see him. She made, accordingly, a hasty toilet before the looking-glass. With an energetic scowl she pulled out her curl-papers, put half a dozen hair-pins into her mouth, and after twisting the blonde coils in the most ruthless fashion, attached them on the top of her head. Finally she arrayed herself in her prettiest brown walking-dress (for she took it for granted that her admirer had come to ask her to drive) and descended into the reception room, where Sir Percy was waiting. She noted an unwonted air of solemnity

in his manner as he advanced to meet her, and vaguely guessed that he must have something of importance to communicate.

"I hope—Miss—aw—Saunders," he began, in his sonorous drawl, "that—aw—you have experienced no ill effect from—aw—our unhappy adventure of—aw—yesterday."

"Oh, not at all, Mr. Percy," she replied, briskly. "I assure you, I wouldn't have missed it for anything."

She fixed her frank, unabashed gaze on Sir Percy with an air of good fellowship which half embarrassed him. He could have wished that she would defer a little to him in his masculine capacity, if not to his rank. But it was very likely that this total lack of perception on her part as to his dignity, heightened the charm she exercised over him. He had been courted all his life, and every whim of his had been treated with respectful consideration. But here was a person who made fun of him to his face, rode roughshod over all his prejudices, and contradicted him with good-humored fearlessness. Sir Percy would not have thought it possible six months ago that he would like such treatment, but surprised himself now by rather relishing it. It was due to his general eccentricity, no doubt, he reasoned, that he should feel pleased with a woman who made absolutely no effort to please; that he should feel attracted to her by the very fact that she showed no desire to attract him.

He seated himself at Delia's invitation in a big, straight-backed chair of antique pattern, ran his hand cautiously over his scalp, stroked his well-trimmed beard, and let his eyes wander with a detached air over the various objects of art which the

room contained. Madame Waldbach was particularly proud of this *salon*, which she had furnished with the spoils of the ages—variegated remnants of historic magnificence, picked up at auctions and in second-hand furniture-shops, refurbished and reupholstered with more regard for economy than for harmony of style. There was an abundance of artistic odds and ends—cracked vases, mended with stratina; big smoky pictures by spurious old masters, in tarnished frames; a French statuette, in terra-cotta, of a young girl in bathing costume about to take a plunge; and a life-size Medea, in plaster, which Madame Waldbach had accepted for board from a young sculptor who possessed no other available assets. The floor was painted dark-brown and covered with Oriental rugs and a big tiger-skin before the hearth.

“I fancied,” said Sir Percy, when he had finished his inspection of the furniture, “that—aw—you’d be—aw—annoyed—don’t you know—at—the—aw—impertinence of those—aw—creatures—those unpleasant, short-skirted girls, that were so—aw—unpleasantly frisky.”

“Oh, no, not a bit,” Delia declared, cheerfully; “I thought, on the contrary, that they were awfully amusing.”

Sir Percy had evidently not expected such laxity of opinion, and it disconcerted him considerably. He began meditatively to poke a figure in the rug with his cane and seemed ill at ease.

“Then you didn’t have a good time, last night?” Delia inquired, after a pause which threatened to become embarrassing.

“No, my dear young lady, I can’t say I did, and—

aw—if—aw—you'll permit me to be—aw—a trifle—aw—personal, I must say that I am—aw—astonished that you—aw—view the matter so—aw—lightly.”

“Well, how else would you have me view it, I should like to know? I don't see anything to be solemn about, do you? unless it was that involuntary jig we danced. But I am sure I feel none the worse for it; though I guess it wasn't exactly dignified.”

Sir Percy lapsed again into meditation, and finding a small hole in the rug, proceeded industriously to make it larger.

“Well, Mr. Percy,” the young lady continued, her spirit of banter conquering her faint scruples, “I wouldn't feel so badly about it if I were you. You needn't be afraid of being compromised; for I, you know, was there to chaperon you.”

“Compromised!” ejaculated the baronet, jumping up with a flushed face, and placing himself squarely in front of Delia; “compromised, did you say? Well, that's it, that's it, exactly. But it is—aw—you who are—aw—compromised, and—aw—not I. I ought to have known before—aw—consenting to your proposition—what kind of—aw—place—it was I was—aw—taking you to. And now I offer you the only—aw—reparation possible. I will marry you, whenever you—aw—say the word.”

“Marry me!” cried the girl, her eyes dancing with amusement; “oh, no, Mr. Percy. That's too heroic a remedy. It isn't as serious as all that. I wouldn't get so excited about nothing if I were you. Don't you see, you were not in the least to blame. It was I who led you astray; but I am not mean enough to take advantage of your innocence. Let us say noth-

ing more about it; and if anybody else says anything, let us own up and laugh it away. That is the only way to treat such a ridiculous affair."

Sir Percy winced visibly under this exculpation, and opened his mouth repeatedly to interrupt. He had arrived at his conclusion by the process which, with a worldly man, is the equivalent of fasting and prayer, and it was difficult to tell if he would ever again be tuned up to this heroic pitch. He could not afford to squander the thought and energy which he had expended in the long debate of which this resolution was the outcome. His chivalrous instinct had prompted it; his reason had, after long resistance, been made to approve of it; and his heart had rebelled far less than might have been expected. That Delia might refuse him had not even occurred to him as a remote possibility. But it slowly dawned upon him now that he had struck a false note; that he had put the wrong foot foremost.

She was evidently a trifle hurt at his proposing to marry her from a sense of duty; and though he had persuaded himself that such was the fact, he had made less allowance for her sentiment of self-respect than he ought to have done. He must, therefore, make haste to amend the false impression. He must make some reference to his heart—profess an irresistible attraction, an undying devotion, or something of that sort.

"Miss Saunders," he said, rising and walking across the floor; but whatever he meant to say he experienced some unforeseen difficulty, and in his embarrassment he turned his majestic back on her and looked out of the window.

“Well, Mr. Percy,” said Delia, in laughing expectancy.

“Miss Saunders,” repeated her visitor, with a tremendous effort, as he faced her again, “what a pity—what a pity—that we have hearts!”

“Yes,” cried Delia, audaciously burlesquing his manner, “and—and—stomachs!”

She placed her right hand with an affecting gesture on the organ referred to, heaved a deep sigh, and burst into a ringing laugh.

“Now, Mr. Percy,” she continued, with a pacifying manner, when she had had her laugh, “you really mustn’t be angry with me. You know I always was an awful tease. I can’t help being saucy. I was born so. But I should be sorry if I had offended you; for you have been so very nice to me that I really shouldn’t have known what to do without you. And, to be frank with you, Mr. Percy, I am not the marrying kind. I’ve got lots to do before I can afford to think of anything so frivolous. If I ever should be guilty of such folly I shall pity the man who gets me. I really like you too well to inflict myself upon you—as a wife; and if you knew me as well as I know myself you would thank your stars that I had more sense than you had. You won’t mind my talking plainly to you, will you? You Englishmen are accustomed to boss things generally—and your wives in particular. You know, I could no more stand that than I could fly. With us in America it is quite different. There the women have the upper hand, as it is right they should have. The men, seeing it is no use to kick up a rumpus, soon learn to sing small. Some wives rule by means of their weakness (which makes the husband

feel like a brute in opposing them), and others by dint of their strength. But rule they usually do, unless they are nincompoops who lack the wit to take advantage of the opportunities which our legal and social institutions throw in their way. Must you go? Well, I know I am boring you with my chatter, but when I get on that subject, I somehow never can stop. The words run out of me like beans out of a bag. Well, good-by, I hope to see you real soon. Mind you, now, I sha'n't believe you have forgiven me unless you call soon again."

Sir Percy had listened without visible interest or emotion to this fluent discourse. It was a relief to him to be absolved from talking, and he was glad he had refrained from saying what in his first wrath he had been tempted to say. He was, like most men of his physical habit, quick-tempered, but his anger was of short duration. He began to suspect that there was a good deal of truth in what the young lady was saying, and before she had finished he was inclined to agree with her and to congratulate himself on her generous refusal of his offer of marriage. It was extraordinary that he could have overlooked the objections which she had so glibly enumerated. With an effort at geniality he shook her hand at parting, and managed to back out of the door with his dignity in tolerable repair. When he was gone Delia had another good laugh, in which she checked herself suddenly, and walked back to her room in serious reflection. She tried to resume her literary labor, but all her pleasure in it was gone.

CHAPTER XXI.

ELECTIVE AFFINITIES.

SIR PERCY, arrayed in drab from his hat to his gaiters, stood upon a box in the railroad station, surveying his forces, like a field-marshal on the eve of a battle. He held in his hand a stout stick, with which he pointed energetically now in this direction, now in that, while he gave orders to a dozen liveried servants, who ran excitedly about, carrying shawl-straps, handbags, and baskets of provisions. It was Sir Percy's habit to repay the hospitalities of which he had been the recipient during the year by an annual picnic or excursion into the Sabine or Alban Mountains, to which all were invited who could make out a valid title to his acquaintance. On the present occasion there were about thirty-five or forty ladies and gentlemen of various nationalities who had been thus honored; and a confusion of French, Italian, and English exclamations were heard from the waiting-room, where they stood in scattered groups in the neighborhood of the doors, watching for the signal to embark. Among the first to step out upon the platform when the signal was given was Miss Douglas, escorted by Count de Saint-Réault, with his needle-pointed mustache and goatee. Although he was in civil attire, his bearing was distinctly military, and in his manner there was a certain exaggerated courtesy which is found nowhere outside of France. The count was taller and of larger build than the average of his countrymen; and his broad, masculine neck and small occiput showed a

strain of English blood. He was gallantly stooping over Constance, or inclining his body toward her, while she spoke, and his expression and attitude betokened the liveliest admiration. Beyond doubt, there was also an unwonted animation in her features as she glanced up into the handsome officer's face, and with light *persiflage* responded to his hyperbolical compliments. There was a dewy look in her eyes and a morning freshness in her whole appearance which were ravishing. With all her simplicity, you saw, if you were a connoisseur, that she was a consummate product of civilization. The broad-brimmed brown Gainsborough hat she wore, the fawn-colored sack which clung to her trim figure as if it were but a divestible epidermis, the inimitable perfection of arrangement and color in every detail of her attire, represented something unattainable except to a very select few whom ancestry and environment have favored. The other ladies, as they walked out upon the platform, ostensibly absorbed in the remarks of their masculine companions, were furtively taking notes on Miss Douglas's toilet, and wondering how under the sun she could afford to dress like that.

It was a delightfully good-humored assemblage which gathered, under Sir Percy's auspices, in the railroad depot on that pleasant April morning. The majority had a sense of distinction at finding themselves in such a select company, and were content with the world because they were content with themselves. The only ones who seemed unconscious of the honor which had been bestowed upon them, and for whose presence no one seemed able to account, were Cordelia Saunders and her cousin, Mr. Burroughs. Sir Percy,

who had had his own reasons for inviting them, took pains to explain to everybody that they were Americans, and rather clever people—you know—in fact, uncommonly clever; he had wished to be civil to them, just out of regard for Talbot, who was an uncommonly nice fellow—you know—and really quite clever—in fact, uncommonly clever. Nor did Talbot, when he overheard one of these speeches, dare to utter the astonishment he felt, and far less to repudiate the friendship of his aggressive countrywoman. That Sir Percy should cultivate Delia in private and apologize for her in public seemed to him wholly incomprehensible. But what troubled him far more was the necessity of behaving with amiable indifference to Burroughs, whose presence affected him with an awkward sense of humility and irritation. When the guard rang his bell and the well-dressed, well-groomed ladies and gentlemen took their seats in the railroad-coupés, he managed, by a little innocent slyness, to become incarcerated in the same compartment with Mrs. and Miss Douglas and the dazzling Count de Saint-Réault. Although the latter's presence was not a source of unalloyed bliss, Talbot had arrived at that stage of infatuation when the tortures of jealousy seemed preferable to those of unsatisfied yearning. His face was bathed in happy blushes while he bowed to Mrs. Douglas and exchanged the frigid civilities of an introduction with the Frenchman. He had nothing in particular to say that seemed appropriate to the occasion, and therefore only smiled in amiable confusion and nestled in a corner of the sofa where he had Miss Constance's face in a good light. Her mother, who was a fussy little short-sighted woman, with unmis-

takable remnants of beauty, displeased him greatly by engaging him in conversation; and he only concluded to forgive her on the score of a relationship which seemed a claim to immortality. He had just resigned himself to cultivating the mother for the daughter's sake, when to his horror he saw that Miss Saunders had discovered him and was steering straight toward him.

"Look a-here, Georgie Talbot," she said, addressing him through the open window, "I don't think you are as smart as you think you are. If you want to run away from me, you have got to hide better than that. Mr. Percy said I was to look after you, you know, so that you don't get into mischief, and I mean to keep my eye on you, whether you like it or not."

She beckoned to the guard to open the door, and without the least ceremony seated herself at his side, opposite Mrs. Douglas. In the same moment the locomotive shrieked, and the train began slowly to crawl out of the depot. It was a special train, chartered for the occasion; and it was Sir Percy himself who, in token of his proprietorship, blew the whistle that set it in motion. Under cover of the noise, Talbot managed to curse his fate with sufficient virulence, without outwardly betraying his chagrin, and to make up his mind that it was his duty to introduce Miss Saunders, regardless of the consequences. As she was Sir Percy's guest, he had, of course, no choice but to treat her with distinguished consideration. He got through with the ceremony of introduction rather more creditably than he had expected, and watched admiringly the exquisite affability with which Constance received the brusque approaches of the Beautiful Heathen.

The train was taking its time, winding slowly through the brown Campagna, dotted with the tall, ruined arches of the Claudian aqueduct, and the glorious tints of the Roman spring absorbed the mind and the vision and made the conversation lag. It was Delia who first broke the silence, and in a manner which fairly made Talbot jump.

"I am real glad to know you, Miss Douglas," she said, in her abrupt fashion; "for, if you don't mind, I should like to interest you in my efforts to introduce the Emancipation Waist in this country."

"I shall be pleased if I can be of use to you," Constance answered, a little guardedly; "but what, pray, is the Emancipation Waist?"

"Why, you don't say you haven't heard about the Emancipation Waist? Well, I must say, this is a slow country. The papers have been full of it for more than two years. I scarcely ever take up an American paper but I find a notice or an advertisement of the Emancipation Waist."

Constance now suddenly perceived that the article concerning which she had thoughtlessly inquired belonged to a part of the feminine toilet which it would be embarrassing to discuss in the presence of M. de Saint-Réault.

"It is the charm of this country to me that it is what you call slow-going," she said, in the hope of dismissing the Emancipation Waist. "I fear I am getting so acclimated to the Old World that I like it the better just because it is old."

"Well, I shouldn't wonder. Americans get awfully corrupted in these foreign parts," Delia declared, cheerfully. "I guess I should get corrupted

myself, if I allowed myself to settle down in an old hole of a palace and forget my mission in life."

"Ah! mademoiselle has a missiong," ejaculated M. de Saint-Réault, leaning forward with sudden interest. "It is permit to inqui-are what is ze charactare of ze missiong of mademoiselle?"

Miss Saunders, who was inclined to take a supercilious view of all foreigners (she professed especially a hearty contempt for all that was French) gazed at the handsome Gaul for a moment in frank astonishment, as Balaam may have gazed at his ass when it opened its mouth and spake. She felt wofully tempted to mimic his manner of speech, and it cost her an effort to restrain herself. "Well," she answered, with a laugh, "the Emancipation Waist—that is my missiong."

She gave a little French twist to the last word, just to try if he would notice it; but apparently he was incapable of believing that she would make fun of him to his face.

"Ze emancipation o'aist," he said, looking at Miss Douglas, as if in search of information: "zat is, I zink, you say—a papare—a newspapare."

"The Emancipation Waist a newspaper!" cried Delia, with a hearty laugh; "oh, no, sir; it is an article of underwear for ladies."

"An article of underwear! vat is zat?" he inquired, appealing again to Constance with his expressive eyes.

"It is a garment, count," answered Mrs. Douglas in French, hastening to her daughter's rescue—"a garment like this."

She made a descriptive gesture with both hands

down her waist, which conveyed an approximate idea of what she meant.

"I zank you," said M. de Saint-Réault. "*Mais* a garment—'ow you mague zat a missiong?"

"Well, that is what most people don't see," Delia replied, with eager promptness; "they don't see that the welfare of the race is at stake in it—that the health and strength and happiness of unborn generations depend upon the dress reform to which I mean to devote my life. It is the question whether civilization is to survive or be wrecked by woman's fatal folly and man's crime in admiring and encouraging her folly."

She was quoting from the printed circular which she had composed, explaining the disastrous effects of the female corset, proving that the corset-wearing nations were bound to succumb in the struggle for existence to the non-corset-wearing, and that, as the former were now the standard-bearers of civilization, the Emancipation Waist had really no less an object than the preservation of civilization.

"You know," she continued, earnestly, with a direct appeal to the count, "that the corset impedes the circulation of the blood and prevents you from taking a full, deep breath. It accordingly reduces your vitality some fifteen to twenty per cent below par, according to the tightness with which you lace. And only think what that means! It is just that little margin which determines success or failure—survival or non-survival. And, as you know, it is not only the present generation that suffers; the reduced vitality in three distinct ways affects the generation still unborn or about to be born. Women who lace during

the child-bearing period rob their infants of the capital of life and strength which is their due. They bring a puny child into the world instead of a lusty one; a predestined failure instead of a predestined success; perhaps a vicious weakling, because vice is often but a form of disease—”

“Pardon me, Miss Saunders,” Mrs. Douglas interrupted, anxious lest the lady’s enthusiasm might carry her too far, “but if you would call upon us privately we should be happy to hear of your labors as a dress-reformer. Count de Saint-Réault, you know, is not married, and can scarcely do anything for your cause—”

“Indeed he can, madam,” broke in the undaunted Delia. “If the count will promise me never to admire or make love to any woman who wears a corset, he will do more for my cause than a dozen editorials.”

“Mademoiselle is vary polite,” the count asserted, smiling. “But so many ozzers would mague love—zat is what you say?—to zose ladies, zay would not miss me.”

“Then show your heroism by making love to those without corsets,” cried Delia.

“Zat would be a test of my sincerity, *en vérité*,” the Parisian responded, with the expressive national shoulder-shrug. “But, mademoiselle, I razzer do ze ozzer. I razzer not mague love.”

“Well, you can have your choice. But, mind you, I am going to keep watch of you.”

“You watch me? Vary well. But I am deeffeicult to watch, mademoiselle, extremely deeffeicult.”

The magnificent ruin of Sette Basse, a villa which

in imperial times must have seen some deep-hued Roman life, here attracted the attention of the travelers, and gave the conversation an archæological turn. Delia said she guessed the Romans had a high old time, but asserted that in the matter of dress their women were far ahead of their modern sisters. Mrs. Douglas, fearing that this was introductory to another chapter on the emancipation waist, hastened to engage the count in a discussion concerning the comparative advantages of European and American life. In the meanwhile, the train rolled along at a leisurely rate over the Campagna, and shrieked a great deal without visible provocation. The indefinable charm of this somber historic plain, where the very grass under your feet sprouts with the rank life of the buried Cæsars, turned the minds of Sir Percy's guests into a lower and gentler key. Some lapsed into silence because it seemed a sacrilege to disturb such rich and mellow peace by shrill and irrelevant speech.

CHAPTER XXII.

SIR PERCY'S FÊTE CHAMPÊTRE.

JULIAN BURROUGHS, unsuspecting of the triumph which Talbot was celebrating, had purposely avoided the coupé in which Miss Douglas and her party were seated. He was so full of his idea of renunciation and his desire to live a worthier life that anything which seemed to interfere with this purpose became to him a danger, a temptation which was to be shunned.

Grantley, having become convinced of his sincerity, had encouraged his ascetic tendency because he felt that it was, at least, a necessary stage in his spiritual growth. And now the two friends were seated together in the coupé next to the engine, which no one else had invaded, discussing the buried treasures of the Tiber and the probable aspect of ancient Rome. Grantley maintained that as the world grew happier it would grow outwardly less beautiful; that, as the average of human happiness rose, the average of architectural beauty would be lowered.

"Don't imagine, on that account, that I prefer the present state of things," he said, earnestly. "No, I am ready to sacrifice a good deal of æsthetic beauty in exchange for physical and spiritual well-being. Democracy, if it means anything, means the gradual elevation of the masses to a participation in the good things which a privileged minority of mankind have hitherto kept for themselves. It is the present unequal distribution which enables the few to cultivate beauty—live in palatial dwellings crowded with pictures, statues, and *bric-à-brac*—but as the democratic millennium draws nigh, that which now goes toward the adornment of the most favored lives will be devoted to the elevation of the least favored."

"Aren't you just a little bit of a Socialist?" asked Julian, to whom this prophecy had an unfamiliar sound.

"No; 'not a bit,'" the clergyman replied. "I don't want anything like a violent redistribution of the world's wealth; but I believe that there are tremendous forces at work in the world which tend toward a more approximate equalization of the lot of

men. There will always be inequality of fortune, as there will be inequality of intellectual, moral, and physical equipment; but government, which is now largely a joint-stock company run for the benefit of those who least need to be favored at the expense of their fellow-men, will, I am confident, gradually lose this character as the down-trodden multitudes gain the intelligence to see their own interest, which now they are far from possessing. All I want to see—and which my great-grandchildren will, perhaps, see—is not the favoring of the weak at the expense of the strong, but (as far as natural laws will permit), the cessation of discrimination against the weak and the unblushing discrimination in favor of the strong.”

“Would you dare to preach that from your pulpit?” asked Julian, deeply interested.

“I not only dare to preach it, but I have preached it, and am constantly preaching it. The beauty of the church to which I have the privilege to belong is that it is less hide-bound in obsolete and unyielding doctrine than any other that is entitled to the name of Christian. It does not (in practice, at least,) demand an undeviating uniformity of belief, which, with the dissimilarities of the human heart and mind, is an impossibility. It does not declare war against modern progress; it has no fear of scientific discovery; it admits the principle of growth, and, while holding fast to the central doctrines of Christianity, anathematizes no one, and pretends neither to open nor close the gates of the kingdom of heaven. It includes ascetics, ritualists, broad churchmen, and even skeptics. It has room for all tendencies and condemns none as long as it is compatible with acceptance of Christ and the

endeavor to walk in his footsteps; it is the true Catholic Church."

It was about eleven o'clock when the train began to climb the little declivity, overgrown with corn and olives, upon which Frascati is situated, and a few minutes later it steamed into the station. Sir Percy, blowing his whistle (though it was hard to tell why), ordered the doors to be opened, and the company gathered about him, expressing their delight at the weather, the railroad-journey, the views, and the perfection of his arrangements; and it was a fact that every possible want had been anticipated and every contingency foreseen. Sir Percy was a master in attention to detail, and had a well-earned reputation as an organizer of excursions. Twenty-five frowzy but safe-looking donkeys were in waiting, each labeled with the name of the lady for whom it was destined, and some of the excursionists who knew their host's peculiarities pretended to look also for labels indicating the gentlemen who were to be attached to each lady as entertainers and escorts. Being left to the caprice of natural selection, these creatures proceeded to illustrate that cruel and ungenerous law in accordance with Darwin. No less than six of them thronged about Miss Douglas, contending for the honor of assisting her into the saddle, while there was a corresponding number of ladies who had to depend upon the gallantry of the donkey-drivers. Sir Percy managed, however, by a few nods and becks and whispered directions to distribute the eager cavaliers, though in some cases not exactly to their satisfaction. M. de Saint-Réault, who was in this respect a radiant exception, was left in charge of Miss Douglas; but Talbot,

whose feelings were ruthlessly trampled upon, found himself attached to Miss Saunders. Two English secretaries of legation (one of whom had earned notoriety by being ejected from the Pope's reception on account of his refusal to kneel) were taken in tow by Miss Bush and Miss Bromfield, two Romanized American damsels who dabbled in the arts and excelled in fine talk. The famous German historian Montrovius, who looked like a bearded Apollo grown old, offered his distinguished company to Lady Mulgrave, who was lying with her yacht and her husband at Civita Vecchia, while Lord Mulgrave devoted himself to patronizing the novelist Mrs. Pearl Shinn, in whose career he promised to interest himself on her return to England. Sir Percy attached himself to no one, as his supervision was everywhere needed.

It was a pretty sight—the long, many-colored procession, climbing, single file, the steep slope that leads from the town to the Villa Aldobrandini, which Sir Percy had hired from Prince Borghese for the occasion. The skies overhead were radiantly blue at the zenith, but shaded downward into soft, golden tints. There was a bright, vernal tone in the sunshine, and the dense, dark masses of stone-pines traced themselves in golden haloes against the horizon. It seemed a glorious thing to live; and the brief span of years that has been granted us, midway between the thronging generations of the unborn and the dead, was a rich boon—an unalloyed blessing. All the harassing cares which, in the New World, complicate the problem of existence, making us old before our time, seemed remoter than the age of the Pharaohs, and more unreal than the “Arabian Nights.” The young girls laughed

with hearty *abandon* as they rode past the somber villas that brood over untold tragedies. Delia, after having exasperated Talbot by her puns and irreverent talk, broke off a twig of a young olive-tree and presented it to him with the request that he follow the example of Noah's dove.

"What did she do?" he asked, sullenly.

"She was gone for eight days," was the cheerful reply.

He was about to take the hint and seek more congenial company, but she peremptorily called him back.

"Look here, Georgie Talbot," she said, "I am aware you don't like me, but that doesn't trouble me a bit. I like you, and that's enough. You are a very nice boy, though you are not always well-behaved. Now, you are dying to tell me that you are in love with Miss Douglas, but you are a little bashful."

Talbot, hardly knowing what to answer, kicked the stones angrily out of the path.

"Why must you always treat me as if I were a child?" he asked, blushing to the tips of his ears.

"I surely don't treat you as a child when I ask you about your love-affairs."

"Yes, you do."

"Well, Georgie, you are a child. You are one of the most charmingly unsophisticated and inexperienced boys I have ever known. Any woman who thought it worth while could make you fall in love with her."

"Suppose you try."

"I? Why, my dear boy, I have other things to do. I am not here for sentimental purposes. And, if

you'll excuse me, if I ever go hunting I shall go for bigger game."

"I like your insolence, at least."

"No, you don't. But you will by and by. You know, all my friends, and my enemies too, for that matter, make a point of telling me their love-affairs. It is my fate to be a depository and trust-company for other people's heart-secrets."

"I should think you would rebel."

"Oh, no; I rather like it. It is a diversion among my more serious pursuits. Do you know, I am very fond of gentlemen? I don't know what I should do without them. They are so nice and harmless and jolly, and then they dress so well. I assure you, I positively dote on them—that is, of course, within their proper sphere."

Talbot had to laugh, in spite of his vexation, at this characterization of his sex, and he began to understand why Sir Percy found Delia such good company.

"You ought to tell that to Sir Percy," he said.

"Sir Percy? Oh, no! I am like Shakespeare in that respect—I never repeat. But since you speak of Mr. Percy, isn't he a nice old gentleman? I should never have believed that I could like an Englishman so much."

"If he heard you call him an old gentleman it would be the end of his liking for you."

"Is that so? But he is as bald on the top of his head as a Limburger cheese."

"Hush! There he is."

Sir Percy, who was a famous pedestrian, came stalking along with an Alpenstock in his hand, mop-

ping his forehead with a large yellow silk handkerchief.

"Permit me—aw—to call your attention—aw—to this view," he exclaimed, sweeping with his stick the line of the horizon.

"Yes, it is very fine," answered Miss Saunders, indifferently.

"You observe—aw—the villa over there—how grandly it—aw—rises against the sky?"

"Yes, quite grandly."

"That is the Villa Torlonia; rather bad style, you know. But—aw—any pile of masonry—aw—against such a background would—aw—be impressive."

"If I could live in a villa like that, I should want to live forever," remarked Talbot.

"You mean if you could have the choice of your companion for eternity," ejaculated Delia. "Now, Georgie, beware, or you'll let the cat out of the bag before you know it.—Do you know, Mr. Percy," she went on, turning to the baronet, "this foolish boy has been falling in love, and he tells me he is going to jump from the dome of St. Peter's if the lady refuses him?"

"Why, my dear fellow!" cried Sir Percy, in genuine alarm. "I hope you are not serious?"

"Miss Saunders is romancing, Sir Percy," said Talbot, quietly. "She has been trying to extract a confession from me which I have declined to make."

"Oh, I shall have it yet," said Delia, laughing.

Half an hour's ride over stony paths, under the crowns of ilexes and olive trees, brought the merry procession to the gate of the Villa Aldobrandini, which swung open upon its grating hinges to receive them.

The villa, whose beauty consists more in its size than its architectural design, rises magnificently from a succession of terraces against a background of ilex and bright-hued shrubbery, its great, dingy, weather-beaten front looking down upon a riotous wilderness of vegetation. There are stately ilex avenues, choked up with weeds and ending in a jungle of tangled vines; there are long, humid tunnels under the terraces, where green and brown lizards slip over the dilapidated pavement; there are ridiculous rococo statues of wood and marble, the former fast decaying, the latter reclaimed by Nature, who has kindly clothed them in garments of green; there is an artificial cataract, descending in a series of cascades from one mossy stone basin into another, and filling the air with its gentle, unceasing murmur; there are damp, dusky arbors with marble seats, cracked and weather-stained, whose dense, inscrutable privacy is haunted with the amorous whispers of stately ecclesiastical ghosts. But, in spite of neglect and decay and the fantastic rococo taste which everywhere crops out, there is an indescribable grandeur over it all—an august historic air, as if each century that passed over the palace had left its dark deposits of human experience for you to decipher.

After having dismounted from the donkeys, Sir Percy's guests scattered through the spacious halls of the villa, which gave an uncomfortable resonance to their voices and steps, inspected the conventional mythological frescoes of Cav' d'Arpino, and speculated upon the character of the people and the life which these lofty walls once inclosed.

"They lived spacioſly, thoſe eccleſiaſtical princes of the Renaiſſance," remarked Talbot, who had man-

aged to constitute himself Miss Douglas's cicerone through the villa. "Oh, how I envy them—those fine, cynical, unscrupulous epicures!"

"And why do you envy them?" she asked, marveling a little at the ardor of his speech.

"Oh," he exclaimed, tossing his head recklessly, "I envy them because they had red blood in their veins and were not afraid if the world knew it. They lived in a dagger-and-poison atmosphere, and carried gayly their lives in their hands, armed to the teeth for defense and offense—beautiful, sleek, dangerous beasts of prey, with velvet paws; graceful and polished; delighting with an exquisite delight in art and poetry; connoisseurs and patrons of sculptors, painters, and archæologists; splendid, warm-blooded personages that moved through life with pomp and circumstance and left long shining trails behind them."

Constance, perceiving the daring light in the young artist's eyes as he spoke, grew a trifle uneasy. She had never suspected such a positive personality in this small and rather dainty man, whose adoration of her she had been at pains to repress. She liked well enough to have him adore her, but it must be respectfully and discreetly, and without annoying demonstrations. She wished now that somebody would come and relieve her of the necessity of keeping him within bounds.

"I don't envy those unscrupulous prelates," she said, rather aimlessly; "I should have been afraid of them."

"So should I, perhaps," Talbot exclaimed, eagerly; "but I should have enjoyed being afraid of them. Can't you see them sit out on the balcony there,

around that cracked marble table, sipping their wine, and discussing, with bright predatory smiles, their villainous ecclesiastical politics, through which ran the unscrupulous love intrigue like a red thread gleaming, by chance, through the tangle of silver and gold? They ruled the world, those cunning scarlet-robed princes of the Church. What wonder that (bachelors though they were) they required palaces covering a couple of acres to shelter their comprehensive households, and small armies of attendants to minister to their complicated wants! One can not help respecting a man who stalks into life with such magnificent demands. And what wretched little insignificant pygmies are we not, compared with them, content, as we are, if we can only gain a tolerable livelihood and sneak through existence without harming anybody or being harmed!"

Miss Douglas gazed up at the walls of the stately apartment—the *appartamento nobile* of the villa—in which they were standing, and suddenly discovered in Talbot's words the most illuminative commentary. She forgot her anxiety and began to enjoy his impulsive eloquence. The villa acquired a definite and highly enjoyable character to her, and her fine eyes lighted up with an unwonted animation.

"Why, Mr. Talbot," she ejaculated, "I can't believe you are an American. Don't you know all that is the rankest heresy in our great republic?"

"Oh, yes, I know it! I know it! But, Miss Douglas, you would scarcely believe it, but I have a grudge against Fate—or rather a hundred thousand grudges. It was first a cruel joke to make a man like me an American; then I ought to have been born in the six-

teenth century instead of the nineteenth. O, how I hate this pale, well-bred, self-restrained age! I should have been content to wake up some fine morning with a dagger in my throat, if I only could have *lived* before dying. Now I shall go to my grave a miserable, virtuous, self-restrained dauber, and no one will ever suspect how red the blood was that ran in my veins."

"It will be your own fault if you do not show us," Constance remarked, unguardedly, and she repented of her words before they were out of her mouth.

"Ah, no, Miss Douglas, it will be your fault," he murmured, in a low voice, through which the deep passion trembled; "you know you can do with me what you like. Since I have seen you, I revolve like a helpless satellite about you and receive only my light and life from your countenance."

There was a touching humility and fervor in his voice which suddenly brought the tears into Constance's eyes. She pitied him so profoundly, and yet could never think of giving her own stately and complex self into his keeping.

"Mr. Talbot," she said, with a sweet kindness which struck a chill to her adorer's heart, "I am sorry that you should entertain this sort of feeling for me, and I pray you to do what you can to rid yourself of it. You know I am older than you, and that in itself ought to be enough to put all such thoughts out of your head."

"And you are taller than I am and prouder than I am and richer than I am," Talbot muttered, smiling bitterly; "but I can not help loving you, any more than I can help breathing. You may think that it is mere wild foolish talk, when I say that I should

die if I were to be deprived of the sight of you. But I feel it in the bottom of my soul that life is impossible to me away from you."

CHAPTER XXIII.

"WHO CAN CONTEND WITH THE GODS?"

THEY had been alone in the vast room, the rest of the company having ascended to the upper floors. But now a door was opened in front of them, and they found themselves face to face with Grantley and Julian Burroughs. The clergyman, seeing Constance, went toward her with both his hands outstretched, his face beaming with pleasure. Burroughs gave a start of surprise and blushed. There was no way of escaping without positive rudeness. For Grantley, not knowing any reason for refraining, would surely seize the opportunity to introduce him.

"My dear Miss Douglas," he heard him say, "I am enchanted to see you. And you, too, Mr. Talbot; I hope you are well. But how is this? You don't know Mr. Burroughs! How extraordinary! I should think that you would be the kind of people who would know each other by inspiration—by instinct. Well, better late than never. Miss Douglas—Mr. Burroughs. Now make up for the time you have lost in missing each other's delightful company."

A strange, tingling numbness possessed Burroughs as he stood bowing in front of the woman who, unknowingly, had filled his life for so many months.

His sense of her beauty was overwhelming. He drew himself tensely erect after having acknowledged the introduction, merely to assert his dignity, to steady his nerves, to overcome the tremor of deference and abject admiration which all but deprived him of his self-control. Her quiet affability—the gentle, tempered radiance of her smile, her look, her entire personality—vibrated through him with an exquisite delight. He realized that all his fight against her had been in vain. He was keenly aware that this was a momentous hour in his life. But try as he might, he could no more identify her with the dangerous enchantress he had feared, who would lure him away from his nobler ideal of life.

"Mr. Burroughs," she began, with a voice whose rich and gentle cadence seemed but her lovely self translated into sound, "I believe we once had a dear friend in common."

He had avoided until this moment to seek confirmation of his conjecture regarding Crampton; but, in reality, he had needed no confirmation. He had known all along that there were not two women in Italy to whom his friend's rapturous description could apply. The world was too small to hold many such women. And yet it gave him a shock to hear her refer so simply and with no sense of guilty responsibility to one who (as she surely knew) had taken his life for her sake.

"You refer to George Crampton? Yes, we were very good friends," he answered, taking pains to preserve the light conversational tone. "We were chums at college, and had many tastes in common."

A vague solemnity stole into her face as she lifted

her eyes to his and said: "I have missed him much since he died. He spoke so often of you. You were quite a hero to him. I believe, even, he read me some of your letters."

"I am glad you are in doubt as to whether he did or not," Julian remarked, smiling gravely.

"No, I am not in doubt. I remember quite distinctly. I remember you assumed an affectionate, elder-brotherly tone toward him which I liked very much. It was just what he needed. For you know, with all his fine qualities, he lacked repose; he lacked judgment and discretion."

They were walking down the spacious hall as they spoke, glancing cursorily at its faded splendors. Grantley and Talbot had fallen behind and were engaged in an archæological discussion, in which the clergyman obviously took a livelier interest than the painter. It was only with difficulty that the latter could collect himself sufficiently to give intelligent replies; for the tragic fact that, in spite of his ungenerous behavior (for which he now despised himself), Burroughs and Constance Douglas had made each other's acquaintance stared him in the face and made him grind his teeth with mortification. He was dimly conscious of having made an ass of himself; and he held Burroughs responsible for all the lamentable bulls he had made in his intercourse with Miss Douglas. For if it had not been for Burroughs, he might have taken his time and behaved rationally, instead of spoiling the whole affair by an idiotic precipitancy. While pretending to listen to Grantley, he was in reality straining his ears to hear what Constance was saying; and the cordiality of her voice, with all its sweet,

musical intonations, filled him with exquisite torture. They were making alarming progress in each other's favor, these two predestined lovers whom he had striven so earnestly to keep apart. For to Talbot's morbid fancy all the rest followed as a matter of course, now that the only effective barrier which separated them had been broken down. He saw them pause before a large brown canvas, in which some robust nymphs with badly cracked faces were disporting themselves rather immodestly, and he drew the inference from the vague, unseeing way in which they glanced at the picture that they were merely seeking a pretext for lingering in each other's company. Grantley, who plainly sympathized with this deceptive manœuvre, displayed suddenly an interest in the frescoed ceiling, and compelled Talbot to turn his aching eyes toward the Olympian hierarchy who sat in unblushing nudity listening to the strains of Apollo and the nine Muses.

"How long have you been in Rome, Mr. Burroughs?" asked Constance; and it seemed to Talbot's suspicious fancy that there was a pointed significance in the way she uttered the simple query.

"Three months," answered Julian.

It was obvious that he had been in no haste to make her acquaintance. If he had known what a long train of humiliating reflections there lay behind her question, he would have pitied her. But he saw nothing but a serene and stately woman, with a certain proud glow in her face and a spark of resentment in her eyes which was extinguished before it was fairly kindled. He never dreamed that his late fantastic friend had, with perverse humility, made a hero of him to Con-

stance, and exercised his poetic fancy in endowing him with a variety of noble characteristics. And far less was he from conjecturing that, from the moment he arrived in Rome, he had been an object of intense interest to her, and had daily wounded her pride by making no effort to approach her.

"You do not do in Rome as the Romans do," she observed, quietly, in response to his admission.

"I am very sorry if I have unknowingly outraged public sentiment."

"No, it is a private sentiment you have outraged," she said, looking up with a smile which had a touch of pathos; "you know, the Romans have spoiled me; and the barbarians as well. They have conspired to make me believe that I am a person of consequence. I am like a petted child which does not like to be ignored."

He may have been preternaturally obtuse, but even now he caught no glimpse of the wounded dignity which prompted this playful complaint. He was so absorbed in keeping his own tumultuous sentiments within bounds that he had no attention to spare for hers; and, as is apt to be the case under such circumstances, he went to the opposite extreme, appearing a trifle stiff and unresponsive. They were standing now before the great folding doors, which Talbot made haste to open, in the hope of terminating the interview. Footsteps and voices were heard above and below, careering with sepulchral resonance through the vast empty halls.

"I shall be happy to see you, Mr. Burroughs, if you'll honor me with a call," said Constance, cordially, under the shelter of the noise. "To be frank, there

is a little business matter, too, which I should like to discuss with you, relating to the legacy which Mr. Crampton left me. I should prefer not to accept it."

"I shall be at your service," he answered, as he lifted his hat, bowed, and withdrew.

He had hardly had time to join Grantley before Talbot, with amusing alacrity, started forward to take his place.

"I don't see how you can endure that solemn prig," he exclaimed, with heedless irritation.

"He does not impress me either as solemn or as a prig," retorted Constance, with mild rebuke.

A quick look of apprehension flitted across Talbot's features.

"I knew it, I knew it!" he sighed, recklessly.

"What do you know?" she asked, with a gaze of lofty amazement at his presumption.

"Oh, nothing."

They moved through the corridor toward the great outside *portone* as they spoke, and met Sir Percy, Herr Montrovius, and Mrs. Pearl Shinn descending with loud-voiced speech and laughter from the floor above. Count de Saint-Réault was acting as escort to the archæological Miss Bush, who was got up like a pre-Raphaelite saint, and turned her spiritual face up to him with an air which was quite devotional. The count, on the other hand, walked superbly erect, and did not bend over her with that air of gallant solicitude which he always exhibited toward Constance. The moment the latter came into view he excused himself from Miss Bush, who blushed excitedly, as he made her his grand obeisance; but she could not help remarking the striking change in his manner as he

approached Miss Douglas, and drawing her inferences accordingly. Democratic though she was (or imagined that she was), she scarcely regarded her small and vivacious countryman Talbot, who reluctantly joined her, as a substitute for so magnificent a personage as the Count de Saint-Réault.

"Ah, mademoiselle," exclaimed the count, with a delightful sense of relief, in his native tongue, "I have been hungering and thirsting for your presence, like a traveler in the desert."

"M. le Comte," answered Constance, "that means in English, I am glad to see you."

"No, mademoiselle, it means more. It means I am enchanted—I am enraptured to see you. I can see and I care to see nothing but you."

"That is very delightful, count, that I am so essential to your well-being. But perhaps you will pardon me if I do not entirely reciprocate your sentiments. I have also an ambition to explore this charming old villa, and, if you will join me, we will take a walk in the garden."

"You make me very happy, mademoiselle."

"You are extremely amiable, count."

This was the style of conversation which had been habitual between these two during the year of their acquaintance. They talked lightly, skimming over the surface of things, and never touching upon deeper topics. It was quite improper, according to the count's creed, to talk seriously with women. He always paid Constance the most extravagant compliments, and she, strange to say, did not resent them. The man was such an embodiment of good breeding—so distinctly the result of a high civilization, and one wholly differ-

ent from the one from which she had sprung—that she found herself admiring when she might have been expected to criticise. In the first place, his wholly chivalrous attitude toward her sex pleased her, and, in the second place, she was not above being impressed by his rank and the mysteriousness of the diplomatic mission with which he was confidently credited. He had the courage to remain faithful to the *ancien régime*, which in those days was identified with the name of the Count de Chambord, and to forego all chances of preferment in the army rather than ingratiate himself with the authorities of the republic. It was understood that his labors in Rome, of whatever nature they were, were in the interest of the Bourbon cause. There was in all this something which appealed to her sense of romance and invested the count with a kind of poetic halo. She was by no means wildly in love with him—chiefly, she reasoned, because it was not in her nature to be wildly anything. Her temperament and character lay along the middle octaves, in which there was a wealth of sweet and tranquil melody, but did not range high into the treble or deep into the base. That was, at all events, the analysis of those who knew her best.

CHAPTER XXIV.

A DÉJEÛNER À LA FOURCHETTE.

THE gardens of the Villa Aldobrandini are large enough to afford privacy for an army of lovers. Talbot walked about as in a dream (though by no means

a happy one) and imagined that he had strolled unawares into a chapter of Boccaccio's "Decameron." Only he had, somehow, got himself entangled with the wrong lady and was powerless to rectify the mistake. Miss Bush found him extremely unresponsive to her fine speeches and pre-Raphaelite attitudes, and her hushed and gentle voice wasted itself in unappreciated efforts. It is a fact that a fine talker never likes to meet another of his own species, which circumstance may account for the young man's suppressed irritability and the mute maledictions which he hurled against the smiling sky. It cheapened horribly his outburst about the Renaissance ecclesiastics to think that this thin, ridiculous girl had hit upon something that sounded quite similar. He found her affected, and she found him disagreeable; but they clung to each other for about half an hour, exploring arbors whose delightful privacy invited quite different sentiments, losing themselves in luxuriant jungles of vines and shrubbery, and viewing from the broad terraces the glorious panorama of the Sabine Mountains bathed in golden light, the dark and silent Campagna, and in the distance the flashing domes of the Eternal City. Miss Bush had just delivered a neat little rhapsody on the mellow richness of the Italian sunlight, and had succeeded in exasperating her companion until he felt as if he could strangle her, when, to their unutterable astonishment, they surprised Sir Percy and Miss Saunders in an interesting *tête-à-tête*. The baronet was seated on the edge of a cracked marble basin, in the middle of which a moss-grown Triton vainly inflated his cheeks, and Delia, who had apparently been sitting at his side, had risen, and was standing in front

of him with an expression on her face which seemed a mixture of annoyance and embarrassment. She was frankly delighted at the sight of Talbot and Miss Bush, and started toward them with an eagerness which took small account of etiquette.

"Now, Georgie," she cried, with a sudden relaxation of her seriousness, "this will never do. What do you mean by going back on me in this style? And me looking for you high and low while you go off flirting with another girl!"

If she could have known how distasteful this style of banter was to him, how in the present moment he positively writhed under it, she would perhaps have had pity on him. But it was not her habit to trouble herself about the sentiments of her victims.

"I always knew you were a heartless flirt, Georgie," she went on, mercilessly, "and of course I ought to have expected that you would trifle with my affections. But this poor, unguarded creature here—I couldn't defend it before my own conscience if I didn't warn her and let her know what sort of man you are."

Miss Delia pronounced this serious indictment with a smiling face and a light and breezy manner which puzzled Miss Bush and Sir Percy exceedingly. They were both too unacquainted with our Western humor to understand that this was meant as *badinage*, and had no serious import whatever. The situation was getting absolutely unbearable, when Miss Bush unexpectedly recovered her dignity, and said, with a constrained laugh :

"Oh, thank you very much, Miss Saunders, but your warning, I assure you, is quite superfluous."

"Why, Talbot," observed Sir Percy, also with an

air of constraint, and wiping his forehead energetically, "who would have thought—aw—who would have fancied—don't you know—that you were such a gay Lothario?"

"Good gracious, Mr. Percy!" Delia burst out, with a laugh which rang with sharp reverberation against the walls of the villa, "why, you English people, you are awfully funny."

"Well," rejoined Sir Percy, with a visible effort to appear at his ease, "that is exactly—aw—that is—don't you know?—what we think of you. You are, as you might say, quite too awfully funny."

"And you think I am serious in hauling Talbot over the coals for jilting me?"

"Well, really, you know—aw—it is hard to know when Americans are serious and when they are not. They do things, you know, that we would never think of doing."

Sir Percy appealed confidently to Miss Bush for confirmation of this judgment, quite forgetting that she was herself an American, though a Europeanized one.

"I have been so long away from America, you know," she responded, with embarrassment; "so I really couldn't tell."

"On general principles," affirmed Delia, with a fresh burst of hilarity, "you may take it for granted that we are never serious. A real American—that is, I mean, a Western American—would joke at his mother-in-law's funeral."

"Now, really, you don't say so!" exclaimed Sir Percy, guilelessly—at which Delia was so overcome with laughter that she came within an ace of seating

herself in his lap. Whether he objected to such familiarity or became suddenly conscious of his duties to the rest of the company, is difficult to conjecture; but he arose with some abruptness, shook the legs of his trousers, and remarked :

“ You will excuse me, ladies; it is time for me to stir up the servants, as—aw—they are capable of forgetting that luncheon is to be served at one.”

He lifted his hat, and descended the long flight of slippery green stairs, along the artificial waterfall.

“ I suppose,” observed Talbot, glancing at Miss Bush, “ that it is in order for us to follow. But take care; the stairs are very slippery. You had better take my arm.”

His animosity to Delia had changed his feeling for Miss Bush to one of comparative cordiality. He now found her clear-cut, saintly face, set in its frame of pale-golden hair, quite pictorially effective. She seemed herself conscious of a certain Old-English quaintness in her wistful gaze and willowy slenderness; for she dressed like one of Rossetti's or Burne-Jones's allegorical maidens who sit under apple-trees, or walk symbolically up or down stairs, or merely stand in “ stained-glass attitudes,” against a golden background.

At one o'clock a melodious bugle-call summoned the company to luncheon in the great dining-hall of the villa. Sir Percy had discovered that there was a mediæval precedent for this picturesque performance; but, whether there was or not, it imparted a flavor of old-time romance to the feast which was relished by all. It had been determined for sanitary reasons to serve the luncheon in-doors, as the earliness of the

season made a *fête champêtre* a little hazardous. Ponderous oaken chairs, superbly carved, but of defective upholstery, had been gathered together from all the rooms of the villa, and a miscellaneous assortment of settees, stands, *tête-à-têtes*, and tables, some straight-legged and classical, some spindle-legged and frivolous *à la Pompadour*, gave one, at first sight, the impression that there was going to be an auction of furniture. To remove the sepulchral chill which is apt to strike one on entering the vast, resonant apartments of an Italian villa, Sir Percy had ordered a fire of logs to be laid on the long-unused hearth; and the flames, as they leaped up the wide-throated chimney, flashed and danced in the polished surfaces of precious glass and silver. Great banks of white, red, and yellow roses in dishes of Venetian glass adorned the table, and filled the room with a delicate fragrance. Cardinal Aldobrandini's ghost, if it were permitted to revisit the glimpses of the moon, would have wondered what the world was coming to.

As it was to be a *déjeuner à la fourchette*, consisting of cold dishes, the gentlemen made haste to capture tables and chairs, and to dispose themselves in congenial groups with the ladies whom policy or inclination recommended to their attention. Miss Douglas had found her place in a rococo *tête-à-tête* with tarnished gilding, and upholstered in ancient embroidered brocade; and facing her, on the other side, sat Count de Saint-Réault, bending forward in an attitude of respectful expectancy, and receiving every word that she uttered as if it were a marvel of wisdom and brilliancy. If he had been less robust and masculine, this seeming humility in the presence of a beautiful woman

would not have recommended him to Miss Constance's favor ; but in one so well-born and dignified it appeared to her almost touching. She had never in her life received homage that seemed so delicate, so unobtrusive, and so thoroughly acceptable.

There was a small army of waiters, and the gentlemen were not required to make foraging expeditions in search of oysters or lobster-salad or ice cream. Every want was promptly discovered by the vigilant servitors, and gratified before it was uttered. It was Sir Percy's pride that his servants were better trained than any in England. And he carried his entire household with him wherever he went, ostensibly for the reason that he could not put up with the impudence and inefficiency of foreign servants.

The champagne-corks gave a resonance like pistol-shots under the wide ceiling, and even innocent sherry-bottles seemed determined to rival them in noise. There was a lively clinking of glasses, animated conversation, accented by occasional little screams of laughter, and a subdued clatter of knives and forks through the spacious refectory. All was so harmonious, so civilized. And yet there was one jarring note ; but there was no one who discovered it except Constance. While she sat exchanging winged platitudes with the count, uttered with a charming subdued vivacity, she was conscious of a pair of eyes resting upon her with earnest intentness. She did not know at first to whom this gaze belonged, but a vague uneasiness took possession of her ; she felt as if some strange cobwebby substance were closing about her, and finally she felt compelled to turn around.

"Might I trouble you to face the other way,

count?" she said; "the light troubles me a little."

"Ah, mademoiselle, I am entirely at your service," responded the Frenchman, rising and wheeling the *tête-à-tête* about; "though you will pardon me for saying that you are not one of those ladies who need fear the light."

"Ah, Monsieur le Comte, but I court it no longer. To a complexion past twenty, the sunlight is always trying."

"Yours, if you will permit me to make so personal a remark, could triumphantly challenge the sun, the moon, and all the stars together."

It would have been impossible to Constance to account for the fact that this airy gallantry, which she had always received and found to be quite in order, suddenly jarred on her. It seemed just a trifle stale and artificial. The thought of Julian Burroughs had not left her for an instant since she had parted with him in the *sala*. To think that he had been three months in Rome, and purposely refrained from making her acquaintance! For that it was an accident was an idea which no rational creature could entertain. Of course, George Crampton, who was always talking about Burroughs to her, must also have written about her to Burroughs. Was it resentment, perhaps, in his friend's behalf which had made him fight shy of her? Did he blame her for Crampton's death? But surely she could not marry every man who took it into his head to fall in love with her! She had been fond of George Crampton; she had treated him as a good friend; but he had been as remote as possible from the type of man which she imagined herself

capable of loving. It would be quixotic to the last degree to hold her responsible for the misfortune which had befallen this ill-balanced and eccentric enthusiast.

She heard the count's vivacious discourse in her ears, and gave the replies which politeness required; but a note of alienism in the man struck her for the first time. His gestures, his voice, his needle-pointed mustache, and, above all, the intonation of his voice aroused a disdainful feeling in her. The few conventional remarks she had exchanged with Burroughs had sufficed to establish a kind of intangible understanding between them, and she had a sense of nearness to him, which, by a complication of feelings, drove the count into the distance. A conviction began to assert itself that there was a far deeper motive than either indifference or resentment for Burroughs's strange behavior. Luminous divinations shot through her mind, and she became possessed with a desire to find out how far her conjectures were correct.

"Oh, M. le Comte," she said, with all her insinuating grace, "you'll pardon me, if I impose upon your kindness, but I have a bad conscience in regard to that American gentleman who stands there under the Flora. I fear I was rude to him in dismissing him so abruptly. Perhaps you will be good enough to bring him up to me, so that I may make amends for my delinquencies."

The count, as one who cheerfully gives out of his abundance, rose with alacrity and hastened toward Burroughs. He felt himself so secure in Constance's favor that he could afford to be generous and give a hungry beggar a chance to pick up a few crumbs from

his table. It was interesting to observe the bow of extreme courtesy with which he introduced himself to the American and delivered in defective English his message.

"Mademoiselle Dooglaas," he said, with his well-bred, conventional smile, "she desi-are ze plaisir of Monsieur Burroughs companee for one moment. She send me to prefare ze request that Monsieur Burroughs confare upon her ze conversation of one moment."

A look of surprise flashed into Julian's eyes as he listened to the Frenchman's words, and a deeper gravity settled upon his features. Was it possible that M. de Saint-Réault did not recognize him or purposely refrained from recognizing him? It filled him with wrath to have this handsome *roué* hover about her, address her, and bring messages from her to him. And yet the purport of the message was of greater importance than the messenger. Exultation and fear wrestled in his heart. He returned the count's bow a trifle stiffly, muttered something about "extreme honor and pleasure," and accompanied him to the *tête-à-tête*, where Constance was sitting.

"Mr. Burroughs," she began, as the count amiably withdrew, "I want to ask you a very feminine question; and if you think it is indiscreet, you needn't answer it. Did George Crampton ever mention me to you in his letters?"

The question was so calmly uttered, and with such gentleness, that it appeared neither indiscreet nor undignified. It was, therefore, with some misgiving that Julian replied, as a spirit of caution impelled him to do:

"As far as I remember, he never mentioned your name."

He had no idea of how cruelly he was again wounding her self-esteem. He noted a faint undertone of agitation in her placid face—a slightly heightened color, and an anxious dilation of the eyes. A dim suspicion of the real bearing of the question flitted through his brain, but he was afraid of trusting so flattering an inference.

“You may think it odd,” she continued, with a troubled smile, “that I should care to know. But I took it for granted that your friend confided in you as he did in me.”

It seemed impossible to frame a reply so as to avoid mendacity in this case; and it was a genuine relief to Burroughs when two liveried waiters presented themselves with trays preceded by savory odors. He displayed all the gallantry at his command; procured a small onyx-topped table just large enough to hold their plates and glasses, and supplied the former with oysters and salad and cold partridge. The lunch was very welcome, and both were content to hold agitating subjects in abeyance while they satisfied the cravings of hunger. They had both a sense of having known each other for a long time; of having resumed an old and delightful acquaintance which had suffered a mysterious interruption. A current of exquisite well-being diffused itself through them, and a mutual confidence and understanding which were in advance of the actual stage of their acquaintance. They talked frankly and naturally of their late friend, and she could even smile at his absurdities; and her eyes were sweet and shining as she raised them to his, trustfully appealing for sympathy. And so it came to pass that his conscience became vaguely troubled at

the inference which he had allowed her to draw in regard to Crampton, and he spoke now with a smiling ease, in which there was no longer a shadow of constraint.

"I may as well confess," he said, his eyes resting admiringly on her lovely face, "that in telling you the literal truth a moment ago, I left you under a false impression. Crampton's letters to me were full of you—but he never referred to you by name."

"How very odd," she murmured. "*Your* name was constantly on his lips. He had taken a strange fancy—"

She stopped suddenly and laughed.

"No," she ejaculated, blushing, "I will not tell you that—at least not yet."

She had quite forgotten the count, of whom she had asked the privilege to make amends to Burroughs. But she now met his gaze riveted upon her with a puzzled frown, as if he suspected himself of laboring under a delusion. She was making amends with a vengeance, he no doubt reasoned. He accepted her faint response to his questioning glance as a summons, and made his way, plate in hand, among the gayly chattering groups, until he paused in front of her. Burroughs, comprehending the situation, rose promptly.

"I fear I have been abusing your good-nature, count," he said.

The count bowed with a slight relaxation in his scowl, but made no reply.

"No, it is I who am the delinquent," interposed Constance.

"Yes, in making me forget time and place and my obligations to the count," retorted Burroughs.

"I go away, mademoiselle, eef you prefare ze companee of zees monsieur," observed Saint-Réault, with boyish ill-temper.

"Oh, count, how can you be so foolish?" she cried, with a bewitching glance at his flushed and lowering face.

She felt in good humor with all the world and could not bring herself to believe in his resentment.

"You deserve to be scolded," she continued, gayly, as soon as Burroughs was beyond ear-shot, "for making such ado about nothing."

"Mademoiselle," he answered, in French, the hot blood again flaring into his cheeks, "I am not accustomed to being trifled with. If I annoy you, you may tell me so, and I shall trouble you no more."

His transparent, uncontrolled jealousy displeased her, and made her restive. It seemed juvenile and undignified. It betrayed a mental alienism which appeared almost odious. She could not help contrasting him with Burroughs who, though he was less imposing physically, had an air of easy self-mastery, and Anglo-Saxon massiveness which was proof against petty irritability. For all that, as she had perhaps given him cause for displeasure, she was bound to conciliate him.

"No," she said, playfully, refusing to recognize his solemnity, "you shall not escape so easily. I can not dismiss you from my service yet. In the first place, I want a glass of Latour Blanche, which I see upon the table, and secondly I want you to enlighten my ignorance in regard to Lachrymæ Christi. Is it a Spanish or an Italian wine?"

His face lighted up instantly. She knew that he

prided himself on his connoisseurship in wines, but she was not prepared for so complete a transformation.

“*Lachrymæ Christi*,” he said, without suspecting her ruse, “is a Neapolitan wine, and grows only in a certain *vigna* on the slope of Mount Vesuvius.”

He took such delight in offering her this piece of information that she felt a little twinge of conscience in having taken advantage of his ingenuousness. Wines were to him matters of tremendous importance, which he was capable of discussing by the hour. A certain robust acceptance of things, and a severely limited perception as to all themes that could not be classed as things, were characteristic both of his race and his profession.

“The *Lacrima* grape,” he went on, expanding with agreeable importance, “will grow anywhere on the Mediterranean, but it ripens only to perfection on Mount Vesuvius. Not one fiftieth of all the *Lacrima* wine you are offered in the trade is genuine.”

“What is the color of it?” asked Constance, with a docile and admiring air.

“It is pink. It has a mildly spicy flavor—a little like *Malvasier*, but not as strong as *Muscatelle*. But, pardon me, you said you wanted *Latour Blanche*. I’ll be back in a moment.”

But the first bottle which he spied proved to be empty, and before he had captured a second, the vacant seat at Miss Douglas’s side had found a new occupant. As it happened, Miss Saunders, who had grown tired of the secretary of the English legation, had risen and was looking about for a more congenial companion. Meeting Constance’s wandering gaze she

steered straight toward her and with cheerful uncere-
moniousness sat down.

"I don't know," she began, with a look of undis-
guised boredom, "why those fellows with one eyeglass
always make me sleepy. I always thought our Ameri-
can men were bad enough as talkers, but the for-
eigners are much worse. They sit all the while and
look at you as if you were some queer bird and say
'aw' and 'aha' and 'yes, exactly' and 'yes, awfully,'
and never give you a chance to guess what they are
really driving at. If I had stayed another minute with
that young diplomatic idiot, I should have got up
and boxed his ears."

"You would have made a sensation," observed
Constance, smiling.

"Well, that's my luck whatever I do," retorted
Delia; "I guess I was made on a sensational plan."

The count here returned with two captured waiters,
one carrying a tray with a bottle of Latour Blanche,
the other a champagne cooler.

"Roederer or Veuve Cliquot?" inquired the dis-
penser of the champagne.

"Neither," answered Constance; "I'll take Sau-
terne."

"I don't know the difference," exclaimed Delia,
with a jovial glance at the waiter, when the question
was repeated to her.

"*Sec* or sweet?" explained that imperturbable func-
tionary.

"That's all Greek to me, you know," she laughed,
appealing again to the solemn red-whiskered Gany-
mede, "but I suppose it's safe to take the same as Miss
Douglas."

She seized her glass as soon as it was filled, nodded gayly to Constance and the count, and was about to drink, when suddenly a thought struck her.

"Oh, I forgot; champagne is liquor, isn't it?"

"Yes, but zat ees not champagne in your glass," replied the count.

"Isn't it? Well, it's wine, which is the same thing."

"Why, my dear mademoiselle; zat is not so; zat is not ze same zing at all."

"Well, it's liquor any way. I signed a pledge last year. I mustn't drink."

"What kind of a pledge was that?" asked Constance.

"A temperance pledge. You know the Woman's Suffrage Association in our State was interested in the prohibition movement, and so they persuaded me to go on the platform and lecture on prohibition. I had to sign the pledge first, of course, which was a very easy thing to do, as I had never been addicted to whisky. But I never thought before that wine was liquor. Any way, I've got to stand by the pledge."

M. de Saint-Réault, who had counted upon a delightful reconciliation with Constance, in which she was to acknowledge her wrong and he to be magnanimous, grew a little restive under Delia's loquacity, and by the sullen folds of his face began to betray his pique. Constance being, on the other hand, disinclined for a *tête-à-tête*, showed the most flattering interest in Miss Saunders's autobiography, and thereby encouraged her to further self-revelation.

She treated herself with great humor, as if she were another person, for whose doings she was in no

wise responsible. She was a graduate of Oberlin, it appeared—a veritable A. B.—and had obtained an honorary A. M. She had been engaged half a dozen times while she was at college, and thought it was a useful experience, as it had given her great self-confidence and a healthy contempt for men. Her novel and amusing expressions and her reckless unconventionality impressed Constance, and inclined her to the opinion that at the bottom of Delia's nature there was something stanch and genuine, but that, from a spirit of rebellion, she took pleasure in representing herself in an unfavorable light.

The sun-flushed mist that hung over the Campagna shone with a deeper gold, and the tall stone-pines looked blacker against the radiant west, when the heavy doors of the banqueting-hall were thrown open, and the company moved, with airy chatter, rustling of skirts, and crackling of shirt-bosoms, toward the upper terrace. The count, with the elaborate courtesy of his race, conducted both ladies out into the open air. There Sir Percy, a little bit flushed with wine, was expatiating upon the beauty of the scenery, and was comparing it with Hong-Kong, Himalaya, and all sorts of outlandish places. He addressed himself directly to Delia, who, after having listened for a while, declared that she couldn't agree with him.

"The last time I was in the Himalayas," she said, "I didn't find it a bit like this; and as for Hong-Kong, there were so many heathen Chinese there that they spoiled the landscape for me. Now, I think, if this reminds me of anything, it is the plains of Benares or the steppes of Kamchatka."

It was fortunate for her that Sir Percy did not

perceive that she was making sport of him; but Constance understood it, and marveled at her audacity.

It is very hard to talk interestingly about a landscape, even if it be ever so beautiful; and there was a sense of relief visible on the part of both ladies and gentlemen when the tribute of admiration had been paid, and it argued no impropriety to relapse into personalities.

CHAPTER XXV.

DESCENSUS AVERNI.

JULIAN had left the dining-hall before the majority of guests, under Sir Percy's guidance, had scattered on the terrace. He had drunk what he considered a very moderate quantity of wine, and had tried to tempt his appetite by experimenting with various dishes. But a mood of deep despondency had come over him, alternating with a wild impulse to throw all considerations to the winds, give up the futile struggle for a nobility that was beyond him, and regulate his life only by his desires. The sight of the count in his eager attendance upon Constance filled him not with irritation, but with a passionate wrath which glowed and smoldered within him. A savage disgust with the world as it was made, and an utter impatience with the future, in any probable aspect that it might assume, took possession of him. With all her adorable simplicity and gentleness, Constance seemed so remote from him that his infatuation struck him as full of tragic probabilities.

He strolled away under the sprouting ilexes, with their tassels of bright leaves, amid the glossy darkness of last year's foliage. The air was full of vagrant odors, which were wafted toward him from the blooming shrubbery. Here and there a clump of tall, dry stalks, with brown, shriveled leaves, stood rustling in the wind, while others, which the rain had overthrown, lay calmly decaying into the soil. A riotous growth of vegetation, with big leaves and long shoots, bursting with rank vigor, rose out of jungles choked with vines and wind-dried twigs; and among the roots grew fat toad-stools, emitting dank, earthy smells. There was an air of neglect and decay everywhere, which in the midst of the flaunting splendor and bloom of the awakening year was infinitely sad. The touch of Mother Earth at such times somehow appeals to a slumbering ancestral lawlessness within us; it arouses unsuspected savage instincts, which we imagined that centuries of civilization had obliterated. Julian felt, as he sniffed the odorous breeze, all sorts of wild, inarticulate desires stirring in his blood. The vernal ferment and dim agitation of strong slumberous powers were thrilling through his blood, and after his long conscientious repression the old Adam awoke, and stretched his stiffened limbs and opened wide his eager eyes. The life he had lived and the battles he had fought during these many months assumed a curious unreality, and seemed pale, distant, and unnatural. Even Grantley, whose saintly heroism had been like a bugle-call in his ears, suffered some strange distortion, and affected him almost with repulsion. Had he not nursed a beautiful delusion, both in believing that he could be like him, and in striving

to emulate such bloodless perfection? A kind of superior pity for his friend flitted through his mind, followed by a fresh accession of loyalty and affection. But it was affection for the man alone, which did not exclude pity for his delusion.

Julian sauntered up one avenue and down another, marveling vaguely at his turpitude, and yet acquiescing in it as a fact. Suddenly he found himself at the head of a broad staircase which led down into a tunnel, connecting the upper with the lower garden. An idle curiosity prompted him to explore this mysterious passage, and without much thought he descended the stairs. The transition from the dazzle of the daylight without was so abrupt that for a moment he scarcely saw anything. He felt a lizard crawl over his boot, and the damp coolness waft over his face. Then, at a distance of seventy or a hundred feet, a shrine became visible, before which a lamp was burning. A wooden Madonna, in a tawdry silver-spangled gown, was holding a rudely carved babe, likewise of wood, and arrayed in a shirt which had once been blue, and showed signs of tinsel paper. It was in a wholly pagan mood that Julian strolled up to this pathetic idol, and after having regarded it with a commiserating smile seated himself on the steps of the shrine. He leaned his head in his hand, and in a confused way began to think of his past and of his future. His perceptions began to clarify; and pangs of regret beset him at many things which it was now too late to alter. All his rebellious reflections of a moment ago were overcome by saner argument; and the resolution to continue the good fight until his nobler and better self should finally and forever subjugate his baser self,

reasserted itself with renewed strength. The image of Constance Douglas, with her pure brow and noble, placid gaze, rose before his fancy like a beacon-light lifted high over the waves, and he lingered fondly at the thought of her, striving to retain, as long as possible, the impression of her loveliness. The old query as to what influence she would exert upon his life—what tendency she would strengthen—recurred to him most forcibly. Would she lead him upward or downward? It seemed sacrilege to ask the question; for she seemed the incarnation of all that was good and noble and beautiful. The thought of having her, of holding her in his arms, calling her loving names, and giving vent to the rapture which the sight of her inspired, mounted like strong wine to his brain, and induced a delirium of delight. But what was that? Footsteps surely—footsteps approaching! The walls of the tunnel gave such manifold resonance that it was impossible to determine whether it was one person or several. But whoever it was, he was coming nearer—nearer. Now the sheen of the lamp fell upon a face—Constance's face. Some one gave a cry which awoke wild echoes; and he stood—he did not know how or why—he stood upright, holding Constance in his arms, and agitated voices sounded in his ears. But he heard nothing except her panting breath, which wandered warmly over his cheeks, and the rustle of her garments, as he swiftly bore her out into the daylight.

After the assembling of Sir Percy's guests on the terrace, all had by common consent started out to explore the neighborhood of the villa. Constance allowed herself to be carried off unresistingly by the count, who, in response to a random remark of hers

about the rank luxuriousness of vegetation in the lower garden, offered to conduct her thither. In order to get there they were obliged to descend a flight of slippery stairs, overgrown with rock-weed, and to penetrate the long, dark tunnel, in which burned but the dim lamp before a shrine of the Madonna. A damp and muggy smell struck against them, like something tangible, as they plunged into the chilly dusk, and Constance drew her shawl shudderingly about her. She would never have allowed herself to be beguiled into such an expedition if she had had the full command of her will-power and had known the nature of the undertaking. But since Burroughs had left her, she found herself in a curiously lethargic and semi-comatose condition. It did not seem to matter in the least what she did, or what was done with her. The count's compliments, which she had hitherto received with smiling satisfaction, appeared now vapid and meaningless, and the whole personality of her once favored admirer had undergone a similar change. There was something futile and trivial and hollow about them. She regretted having accepted his escort upon this adventurous *descensus Averni*. Nevertheless, she clutched his arm with an energy which he was in danger of misinterpreting. For she had once a sensation of stepping on something alive, which sent cold shudders down her back. And presently a dreadful conviction took hold of her, that something was stirring behind her, following close in her steps, moving when she moved, pausing when she paused. She would have liked to turn around and see what it was, but she could not summon courage to do it. There it was again, unmistakably. Could it be a robber or high-

wayman? The neighborhood, she had heard, teemed with dangerous characters; and it was not so very long since Prince Lucien Bonaparte was attacked and plundered with his entire household at his Villa Rufinella. The count, too, was afraid of something; for he urged her on as much as he could without betraying his fear. But the footsteps behind her kept pace with their speed. Constance saw, with the vividness of terror, an awful bloodthirsty face close behind her, coming nearer and nearer, and a pair of brown, bony hands outstretched to clasp her neck in a strangling grip. With this cold horror clutching at her heart she rushed forward. The lamp, the shrine, the rude features of the Madonna, reeled and were engulfed in the encompassing gloom. A sound of rushing waters filled her ears; and she felt herself sinking, sinking—but suddenly caught in a firm embrace and hurried away, she could not tell whither. A sweet repose diffused itself through her mind, and she lost herself in a white, blissful void, and dissolved into the infinite nothing.

When she regained consciousness she found herself lying on the gravel in the garden, with Burroughs's coat rolled up under her head. He was kneeling at her side, bathing her temples with eau-de-cologne and holding a vinaigrette to her nose. On the other side of her stood young Talbot, with a face full of acute misery, and the count, with an angry frown upon his brow, biting his mustache, and bristling with suppressed hostility. The sun shone all about her, the leaves of the ilex rustled, and there was a great stone-pine which blotted out half the sky. That was the only impression which for a long while penetrated her torpid senses. Then slowly her memory asserted

this fact and that—but the face of Burroughs leaning over her, with tender solicitude, had somehow no connection with anything she could recall, and made her doubt whether she was fully awake.

“It is this young man,” she heard the count say, in a tone of irritation; “it is he who has caused this misfortune.” He did not point toward Talbot, but he turned his head toward him and stared at him with savage severity. In response to Constance’s wondering look, he continued, “It was he who walked behind us and frightened you.”

Talbot looked the picture of abject humility and despair; he almost tottered under the burden of his guilt. It was his torturing jealousy which had prompted him to play the spy. To see his beloved plunge, as it were, into the bowels of the earth with his detested rival (it was in this kind of melodramatic language that Talbot depicted the situation to himself)—what sort of lover would he have been if he had endured such an affront? Of course he had not intended to frighten her out of her wits, nor had it occurred to him that his stealthy footsteps behind her (which he imagined were quite inaudible) would send her flying toward the shrine where that loon Burroughs was moping over his disappointments. It was he, rising like a phantom out of the dusk, who had done all the mischief, and against whom the count’s wrath ought to have been directed. Ah, yes; women were enigmatical creatures, at best. He was a fool to make himself miserable on their account. But he would have had to be more than human to preserve his equanimity at the sight of those two odious fellows, assisting Constance to rise and vying with each other in

ministering to her comfort. He did not know whom he hated most—the nobleman or the commoner.

“Now, gentlemen,” said Saint-Réault, with frigid civility, bowing with an air of dismissal to the two Americans, “we are vary obliged. Mees Dooglas need you not more. And you, Meester Talbot, I shall have ze pleasir to send a friend to you to-morrow, to call you to account for your *espionage*, ees it not so?”

Talbot felt as if his heart would break. The way that high-nosed Frenchman said “we” nearly drove him to distraction. He could have murdered the count with enthusiasm, and he felt a tragic satisfaction in the probability that to-morrow the count might have the privilege of murdering him instead. For that the friend’s call meant a challenge he had no doubt, and those military fire-eaters were expert shots and swordsmen, against whom he could scarcely hold a candle. The young man, in a state of exalted misery, marched down the weed-choked gravel-walk, and hid his sorrows behind the foliage of a wild-growing arbor.

Burroughs, in a different frame of mind, followed a diverging path, striding heedlessly along, torn by conflicting emotions. A savage wrath and a savage exultation alternately chased his blood through his veins and kindled sparks of excitement in his eyes. His courage flared up with his resentment at being dismissed in that lofty way; and he regretted having acquiesced in the count’s dictation, when obviously he had forfeited his right to dictate. But then, the glory of having held her in his arms—the reminiscent pressure of her noble form—the lingering delight of her touch, as he fondly strove to retain it—tingled through his nerves and made his pulses bound. With a vagrant

impulse, stimulated by the strong emotions, he broke through the hedges, struck across the solemn cypress grove, and stared with a blind preoccupation at the dancing fountains. He heard faintly the summons of the bugle from the terrace, and saw, as in a dream, the ladies mounted upon donkeys, each escorted by a cavalier, move out of the gate and descend the stony slope. Now and then a pretty face and figure became visible above the wall, a bright-colored garment glimmered between the great tree-trunks, and a snatch of gay laughter re-echoed from the grand façade of the villa. But it appeared in no way to concern him; he had lost all sense of coherence with the world about him. Only one thing was of consequence; only one thing concerned him. He flung himself down under a stone-pine and listened absently to the twitter of the birds overhead. And hope sang in his blood like a siren.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A PERPLEXING SITUATION.

TALBOT paced up and down the mosaic floor in his stately studio. He was in a state of feverish excitement. Now he felt glorified, exalted, and then again humiliated, angry, and mortally frightened. He did not like to acknowledge this latter emotion, but, for all that, when the cold fact stared him in the face that before night he might be a dead man, he found it impossible to suppress a nervous tremor. He had spent the night in making a pathetic will, in which he be-

queathed his pictures and all his other effects to Constance Douglas, "as a memorial of the love he bore her." There were no reproaches, no sentimental allusions, but merely this barren, matter-of-fact statement, which he repeated to himself, with tears in his eyes, as he walked up and down the floor. He never observed where the rugs ended and the mosaic commenced, and the sudden click of his heels upon the stone gave him every time a slight shock. The vision of Constance in her suave and lovely dignity—so gentle, so high-bred, so distractingly adorable—hovered before him wherever he turned; and the thought that this one glorious woman—the only one in all the world for him—should belong to that soulless, mechanical puppet of a Frenchman filled him with an agony of despair. He had never imagined that this wild strength of suffering was in him. It seemed as if every cord of his being must snap—as if every breath that broke with pain from the depth of his breast must be his last.

His breakfast was sent to his bedroom, which adjoined the studio, at about nine o'clock, but he found it impossible to touch it. Watkins, the servant, observed with wonder that he had not been undressed, and asked respectfully if he might not bring him a glass of port wine or sherry. Talbot nodded, and continued his restless walk. On the return of the servant he drank a glass of sherry, and his agitation presently gave way to a dogged stoicism. He was about to seal the envelope containing his will, when suddenly it occurred to him that without a witness it would not be valid. He accordingly rang for Watkins, and with a nonchalant air begged him to witness the signature of

this paper. Watkins, taking in the situation at a glance, scrawled a series of large and rambling letters which might or might not mean Watkins. Then he took his leave noiselessly, and within two minutes Sir Percy emerged from his bath, arrayed in a long dressing-gown thrown over his *robe de nuit*, and advanced with a startled countenance to the middle of the room.

"Why, what the deuce—aw—does this mean, Talbot?" he cried, quite out of breath. "Watkins says you have been making your will."

"Well, I just thought I might as well do it now as some other time," Talbot replied, with forced gayety. "Nobody knows when he's got to turn up his toes, Sir Percy."

"Oh, stuff, my boy! stuff!" exclaimed the baronet, impatiently. "You don't fancy—aw—you can fool me with that sort of chaff, do you?"

"I don't want to fool you, Sir Percy; but, really, if you will pardon me, I think I am master of my own conduct, and do not owe you an account of my actions."

"Oh, come now, my dear fellow, don't be huffed. You don't owe me—aw—anything but what you would—aw—owe to—aw—any friend who takes an interest in you. Whether you like it or not, I am going to stay with you to-day and see that you don't commit any folly."

Sir Percy, wrapping his rich Turkish dressing-gown about his portly form, went to the door and rang the bell. When Watkins reappeared, with a promptness as if he had been attached to the bell-cord, his master ordered, with much minuteness, the clothes which he was to wear and his toilet-case.

"My dear fellow," the kind-hearted Briton soliloquized, as he stood before the mirror brushing his scant locks with two superbly-carved ivory brushes, "I knew it well enough yesterday. You have—aw—fallen under the enchantment of Circe, don't you know?"

Talbot, who saw that every motion he made was watched in the mirror, flung himself into a chair and sighed. He knew that his noble friend was perhaps the most stubborn man of the most stubborn race that the sun has ever shone upon, and he was aware that remonstrance on his part would be sheer waste of breath. He therefore resigned himself, with much bitterness and vexation of spirit, to the inevitable, and fell to watching the various operations of the baronet's extremely complicated toilet. He could not help admiring his magnificent build, his great, hairy chest, his straight and robust figure, his red, masculine neck, and the conscientious care which he bestowed upon his personal adornment. The array of silver-topped cut-glass bottles stretched itself farther and farther across the curtained *duchesse* toilet-table, and a large assortment of brushes and instruments of manicure occupied all the space that was left. The valet, who stood by, silently handing his master each article as it was needed, was the most perfect human automaton that ever could have been devised. The undyed camel's-hair under-clothes were fine as silk and as light and soft as down. As the sublime never lies remote from the ridiculous, Talbot soon found himself pitying his own simple estate. When compared with this indisputably superior product of a more complex civilization, his hasty ten-minutes' toilet appeared to him like

a remnant of barbarism. As a mere well-groomed animal, he surely could not hold a candle to his host. And might not that possibly account for the light esteem in which he was held by the woman he loved? It was an instinctive sentiment on her part, of course; but was it at all unlikely that she, who herself belonged to the physically elaborate, highly developed species, might feel a half-unconscious alienation from him because he was a less perfect animal and less carefully tended? The count moved at her side with stately ease as her peer and equal, and not a hair of his head or of his waxed mustache was ever out of order. His nails were long, polished, and rosy, and his hands large, firm, and of fine shape. That, in spite of this, he was unutterably detestable, she could scarcely be expected to discover, because she had lived only on the surface of her soul, and had never had any experience which had stirred its depths.

It was a bitter discovery the young artist made while he sat there watching Sir Percy preparing himself for the battle of life. He came to the conclusion that his love was hopeless; that even if he was not killed to-day—even if he had never been refused—there was not a shadow of a possibility that Constance would ever put up with such a second-rate specimen of humanity as himself. It accordingly made very little difference whether the count killed him or not; and he determined, when the second called, to choose pistols and as short a distance as the rules permitted.

It was a little after ten o'clock when Sir Percy dismissed his valet, hooked his arm in Talbot's, and conducted him into the studio. The latter, being too utterly broken in spirit to offer any resistance, dropped

into an easy-chair and hid his face in his hands. The baronet remained standing in front of him, and gazed at him with eyes full of compassion.

"Talbot, my boy," he said, seriously, "I am sorry for you; I am awfully sorry for you. If it were—aw—a heartless coquette who had set her trap for you, I could—aw—I could perhaps help you; but she isn't that sort. The deuce of it is that she is divinely perfect. If I were—aw—twenty years younger, I might make my will, too, because she had refused me—don't you know?—and put—aw—a hole through—aw—my cranium, and make no end of—aw—unpleasantness for my friends. But—aw—I have, on the whole, forgiven her—aw—for not wanting to be Lady Armitage, and—aw—I dare say you will forgive her for not wishing to be Mrs. Talbot, don't you know?"

Having delivered himself of this speech, which was the longest Talbot ever had heard him make, Sir Percy began to pace up and down the floor, pausing every now and then before the sketches and unfinished pictures which adorned the room. The studio was a perfect museum of picturesque antiquities; mediæval swords, armors, helmets, and breast-plates shone upon the walls, and a variety of rich textile fabrics, Italian and Oriental, were draped over easels, tables, and carved chests of oak, exhibiting gaunt saints in devotional attitudes. All these treasures belonged to Sir Percy, but he delighted to play Mæcenas, and his liberality toward his artistic *protégé* knew no bounds.

"Talbot," he said, after having studied a bronze Faun upon the mantel-piece with feigned interest, "I wish you would cheer up and go to work. I don't want—aw—to scold; but for your own sake—don't

you know?—it might be a good thing. I can pardon—aw—a man in love for being lazy, but I can't—aw—pardon a lazy man for being in love."

This unexpected epigram so pleased its author that he had to take another turn on the floor, and the world in general began to assume a more cheerful aspect to him. He was about to impart some more good advice, when Watkins entered and presented him with a card upon a silver salver.

"M. Raymond de Bellac! I know no such man."

"The call is for me," said Talbot, with forced composure, lifting his pale and suffering face from the arm of the chair.

"You wish me to go?"

"If you would be so kind."

Sir Percy stood for a moment hesitating, and turned at last to go. But before he reached the door he faced about and took three rapid steps toward his young friend.

"Talbot," he said, in a voice of sympathetic distress, "you have some devilish plan in your head. There is—aw—no use denying it."

"Well, suppose I have; what are you going to do about it?"

"Watch you till you recover your reason; that is what I am going to do about it."

"I shall never recover my reason, as you call it."

"My dear fellow, that is—aw—what we all think, don't you know? But never is a good while. I will lay you a hundred guineas that—aw—in a fortnight you will have taken your place rationally—aw—with the rest of us at the—aw—foot of the shrine and be—

aw—humbly content with the sight and the smile—aw—of the goddess.”

The baronet had in the mean while made a sign to Watkins to show the visitor in. Presently a small, dapper Frenchman, with an ominously solemn mien, was ushered into the room. He gazed doubtfully from Talbot to Sir Percy, and, as the latter seemed to assume the duties of host, he approached him with a ceremonious bow, and said :

“I have the honor to present to you, in behalf of my friend M. le Comte de Saint-Réault, a challenge to fight a duel, with swords or pistols, as it may suit your convenience.”

“Ho, ho !” ejaculated Sir Percy, “I was—aw—expecting something of that sort.—But, my dear boy,” he cried, turning to Talbot, “what have you been doing to the count—aw—to make him—aw—want to kill you? I thought you said—aw—you had been refused.”

“No, I didn’t say it.”

“Then you have been accepted ! *Corpo di Bacco !* But what the deuce is it you are—aw—moping about, then ?”

“You can’t understand, Sir Percy, and I can not explain.”

“You are—aw—not exactly complimentary, don’t you know ?”

Talbot looked wearily out of the window.

“If you will pardon me, Sir Percy,” he said, after a pause, “I will settle this affair with M. de Bellæ, and you will have the kindness, I hope, not to—not to—”

“Not to interfere. Yes, exactly. All right, my

boy. If you want—aw—to make a target of yourself, it is—aw—your affair and not mine.”

Sir Percy made a bow to the Frenchman, and, to Talbot's surprise, took his departure. When his broad back vanished behind the blue *portières*, his *protégé* drew a sigh of relief, and proceeded, in as good French as he could command, to make arrangements for a duel in a vineyard outside the Porta Pia at seven o'clock the following morning. Quite unconsciously he took for his model the hero of one of Sardou's plays, and acted with an airy nonchalance which he felt to be extremely impressive. He insisted upon pistols and twenty paces, and remarked with a melancholy smile that he hoped that the count would forgive him for taking an advantage of him in presenting the smaller target. He hoped the count's superior skill in the use of weapons would compensate for this disadvantage. M. de Bellac, who was quite unprepared for such blood-curdling *sang-froid* in an American, objected to his barbarous conditions, and gave Talbot the satisfaction of playing his heroic part to the end. Of course I do not mean to insinuate that his sorrow was feigned and his conduct insincere; but his temperament was so constituted that he could act and suffer simultaneously. A curious sub-consciousness of heroism throbbed through his sore and aching heart, without at all relieving its soreness.

After a conference lasting half an hour, M. de Bellac backed out of the room with many bows, promising to return in the afternoon with the count's acceptance or proposed modifications of the conditions. Talbot spent the forenoon (as he felt, under the constant surveillance of the servants) in writing farewell letters to his

friends, until he was interrupted by the announcement of luncheon. He found Sir Percy, who had just returned from a drive, in excellent humor, without at all suspecting the cause. But at three o'clock, when M. de Bellac returned with a letter from the count unconditionally withdrawing his challenge and declaring that it had been provoked by a deplorable misunderstanding, the plot began to unravel itself, and he divined that Sir Percy must be at the bottom of it. He felt angry at first, and humiliated; he could not but regret the wasted misery and poignant sorrow of the night. But he did not dare question Sir Percy, or complain. He knew that what he had done was prompted by the kindest feeling. A strange lassitude came over him. He felt weary and withered in every limb. The world lay like a great dreary blank before him. But when he closed his eyes, there shone with a mild radiance in his memory a pure and lovely face, and a pair of clear and tranquil eyes gazed upon him with a divine compassion.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE SUPREME MOMENT.

ALL thought was gradually obliterated, and a mere bright vacuity filled Julian's mind, as he lay under the great stone-pine smiling toward the sunset and the world in general. There was a tremendous illumination of flaming saffron, purple, and gold behind the domes

and towers of the Eternal City; and long shafts of fiery splendor strayed up toward the zenith. Such a serene contentment had invaded the young man's soul after his agitation that he could afford to smile even at his jealousy, and make light of everything that interposed itself between him and the goal of his desires. He could not have adduced any rational basis for his confidence; it was simply a sentiment of the hour—a sense of spiritual freshness and strength; an imperious upwelling of youth and conquering energy.

It seemed to him, as he lay there in the rays of the setting sun, that the sound of his name floated with a vague æolian echo above his head; but deeming it a delusion he refrained from answering. Five minutes passed; and again the curious phenomenon was repeated. He raised himself on his elbow and looked about. Except for the nightingales that warbled rapturously in the tree above him, the garden was silent and deserted. He was about to lapse once more into his reverie when he heard Grantley's voice shouting his name with startling distinctness. He aroused himself from his lethargy, rose up, stretched his limbs, which had grown somewhat stiff, and answered. There was a joyous ring in the next shout which followed; and presently Grantley was seen on the upper terrace, shading his eyes against the sun, while he stared into the luxuriant wilderness.

"Burroughs, where are you?" he cried.

"Here," answered Burroughs, strolling along the gravel-walk toward the terrace.

"But, in heaven's name, old man, don't you know that every breath you draw here after sunset is freighted with death?"

"Why, no. I had no idea of it. Any way, the sun is just now setting."

"Yes; but hurry up. The train has gone, and you musn't linger here a moment longer."

"All right. I am coming."

They met on the upper terrace, and, after some strong expression of reprobation on Grantley's part at his friend's folly, they started on foot for the town, caught a later train, and reached Rome about nine o'clock in the evening.

The next day the rain came down in torrents. Julian awoke late, and after breakfast sat smoking and staring at some American papers which had been sent him by his father. But though he read the same paragraphs three or four times, they failed to convey any meaning to him. His thoughts seemed incapable of concentration on any subject unconnected with the one which diffused itself like a golden haze through his mind. He seated himself at the window, and absently watched the long slanting lines of the shower, and the fitful writhings of the smoke that issued from a chimney opposite. The steady drumming of the rain on the roof, the splashing discharge of the water-spouts into the gutters, and now and then a total blotting out of earth and sky in a furious downpour gave, in a purely mechanical way, an outward direction to his senses, but it was like a scene in a trance which flits by leaving no impression.

The thought of Constance, the recollection of her loveliness, and particularly her invitation to him to call, were burning and glowing in his brain. The minutes dragged along at a wretched snail's pace; and the hands of his watch seemed to experience insur-

mountable difficulties in reaching the hour of noon. When finally the Trinita de' Monti, which was always celebrating some saint's birth or demise, gave forth a muffled sound of bell-strokes through the rain, Julian wrapped himself in his Mackintosh, and sallied forth into the uproar of the elements.

Delia, who heard him go out, watched him from her window, and saw him mount the Spanish stairs, now deserted by the models, and gradually vanish from her sight like a ship in a fog.

"I declare," cried Delia, in amazement, "he has got it bad."

For she did not deceive herself as to where her cousin was going.

She picked her way among the sheets of large-lettered manuscript which covered the floor, and seizing her diary made the following sage entry:

"The stupider a woman is, if she only looks well and dresses well, the better the men like her. The more indifferent she is to the interests of her down-trodden sex, the more adorable they think her. Subject for article or lecture: 'The most formidable enemy to the cause of Woman's Emancipation is Woman—the pretty, contented, shallow-brained woman, who basks in the degrading admiration of the men, and is incapable of aspiring for anything better.'"

Julian strode through the storm in a half-dazed fashion, being scarcely aware of its violence, but reached the Palazzo Barberini without accident. He had discovered somewhere in the recesses of his nature a deep appetite for happiness which seemed the direct antithesis to his former ascetic zeal. It had appeared to him until yesterday that God demanded the morti-

fication of the flesh—that he required the renunciation of all pleasure, as a test of the singleness of our devotion to him. There had been a certain satisfaction in the ardent mood of renunciation, as there was now in the sweet hope of being beloved. Whence that deep confidence came which now rose within him and cried out with jubilant voice he could not tell. It was built on very flimsy premises; and was incapable of analysis. But here he stood at the bottom of the broad marble staircase, with the grandly arched ceiling above; and his heart was beating tumultuously at the mere prospect of seeing the face and hearing the voice and feeling the touch of Constance Douglas. He had just arrived at the second landing of the stairs when he became aware of a tall figure wrapped in a military cloak which appeared to be descending. He took off his hat, and Count de Saint-Réault mutely returned the greeting. A contemptuous smile hovered about the corners of his mouth; he paused for a moment, as if about to speak, but reconsidered and passed down in silence. Burroughs noticed that the rain-drops were yet dripping from the visor of his cap, and that his mustache was a trifle demoralized. It was evident that he had not been received. Julian felt, however, no uneasiness as to his own fate; and it interfered in no wise with his happiness to observe the count's attitude of anxious expectancy at the bottom of the stairs, as he handed his card to the maid Hortense, and was provisionally admitted. And why did such an inexpressible well-being come over him, when he entered that softly-draped *salon*, where the pagan love-gods danced along the frieze and flung their chubby legs about and found life all laughter

and roses? There was something warm and richly subdued in the light that stole in between the folds of the tawny curtains, and in the faded Gobelin tapestries which covered the walls. This was her world, and what a beautiful world it was—rich and rare and instinct with delicate refinement like her own wondrous self. Her life was like a rich, mellow fugue, with a stately *andante* movement, varied by an occasional hushed little *scherzo*, always dignified and harmonious, never jarred by a single discord. And for such a life no setting could have been more appropriate. Julian was enough of a connoisseur to relish the fine Renaissance style of the decorations, and the fastidious artistic taste which was revealed in the stuffs and colors of the upholstery. Some such reflection was flitting through his brain, when suddenly a *portière* was drawn aside and he found himself face to face with Constance. She smiled radiantly at him, as she reached him her hand, and he imagined he read in her glance a cordial liking and confidence. She wore a cream colored morning-dress, with an elaborate front of flowered pink satin, fitting snugly about her fine form, and with a Watteau plait starting from the neck and trailing behind her. She seated herself on a little spindle-legged lounge, covered with yellow brocade, and the regal way in which she swept her train forward, as she sank down among the silken pillows, gave him an utterly irrational thrill of pleasure.

“It was kind of you to come to see me in this dreadful weather, Mr. Burroughs,” she said, with a kind of sweet drawl, which somehow told him that she had not been very long out of bed. There was a soft,

matutinal brightness in her eyes, too, and an exquisite little languid droop in the way she held her head, which were to be accounted for by the same fact, and which, to her chivalrous adorer were replete with tender suggestions.

"I have a little confession to make to you which could not be postponed on account of the weather," he answered with a faint smile.

"Ah! You make me curious. I think, however, I can guess what you are going to say. You have come to ask my pardon for your shocking behavior to me?"

"My shocking behavior?"

The playful note in her accusation relieved him of all apprehension as to the nature of his offense, and he awaited with smiling acquiescence her indictment.

"You surely do not wish me to remind you again that you were three months in Rome without seeking my acquaintance."

"No," he said, looking straight into her eyes with appealing earnestness, "I do not need to be reminded of it. My remaining away was no accident, and if I were to confess my reason, you would freely forgive me!"

"I am not so sure of that."

She colored with the consciousness of handling a dangerous topic. A swift divination told her what his reason was; and she had, prompted by an urgent desire, rashly invited him to reveal it. She was aware that in this man there was a mysterious fascination, a compelling force, which made her, in dealing with him, reverse her usual tactics. Her greatest difficulty, in times past, had been to make men restrain and dis-

guise their sentiments toward her; and now she was actually inviting a confession.

Burroughs had in this moment so acute a perception of her loveliness, that he had to exert all his strength to preserve his self-mastery. His pulses bounded with the consciousness of being loved by this glorious woman; and he felt a certain impatience at the necessity of polite hypocrisy in the presence of this transcendent fact. On the other hand, if there could be the remotest chance of his deluding himself, could he afford by foolish precipitancy to imperil his life's happiness?

"I believe I told you," he said, twisting the ends of his mustache, "that Crampton, in some fantastic mood—you knew what a wild romanticist he was—amused himself—or—I ought not to say that—gave vent to his enthusiasm for you in his letters to me. He described you with a skill—which had unfortunate results for me."

"How so?" she murmured with soft breathlessness.

"I fell in love with this wonderful fair unknown, whom Crampton so glowingly described to me."

"You fell in love with her?" she repeated, the exquisite hue in her cheeks deepening.

"Yes, I fell in love with her—I loved her. I came to Rome to find her."

They sat silent for some minutes, looking at each other intently, without a shade of embarrassment.

"How very extraordinary," she exclaimed, half rising, and putting her hand to her forehead. He noticed what a noble hand it was, and how the fine ancient lace that encircled the wrist enhanced the purity of its form and contour.

"It would have been more extraordinary if I had not fallen in love with her," he declared fervently.

She could no longer master her agitation; she desired to appear playful and indifferent, but found it impossible to recover her wonted serenity. Pushing her hair back from her ears, she arose and walked to the recess of the window which was heavily draped with curtains.

"You should not have told me, Mr. Burroughs," she said with a rich plaintiveness, showing him her flushed, half-averted face, "that you stayed away for such a reason. How can you expect me to forgive you for finding my real self inferior to the one you had imagined?"

"I have not said that!" he cried with happy audacity, "I stayed away because I found it a thousand times lovelier."

"You expect me to believe that! Men are not apt to stay away for such reasons."

She was standing between the *portières* with her back turned to him, looking at him with a bright, warm radiance, over her shoulder. Her expression altogether belied the skepticism of her words. She had received the assurance for which her wounded pride had cried out during these three months. She had imagined before that it was only her pride which had yearned to bring this man to her feet; simply to punish him for having shown such persistent indifference to her long-recognized sway. But now that she had him where he ought long since to have been, she hesitated to inflict the punishment. She felt an unsuspected tenderness for him stirring in the depth of her nature. She felt drawn toward him in a way that she

had never experienced with any other man. First, there was the sense of nearness—national kinship—ready sympathy and comprehension—and then he impressed her as a strong and a considerable personality. With all his frank and open manliness there was something almost appealing about him which touched her; something storm-beaten, suggesting suffering endured, and manifold masculine experience. She was so constituted that this, instead of repelling her (as it might an *ingénue*) warmed her heart toward him, and made her feel for the first time in her life that conjoined physical and spiritual attraction which finds its natural expression in a caress.

In obedience to a similar attraction, Julian had risen and approached the window where she was standing. The glorious spring rain came plunging down with a superb impetus from the clouds, lashed the window-panes, filling the air with its rush and splash. The light was dim in the room, and every now and then, as a more vehement shower swept across the sky, it deepened into twilight. But the dimness gave a grateful sense of security and isolation to the two who stood in the embrasure of the window, "in a tumultuous privacy of storm."

"I can not allow you to doubt my sincerity," he said, in response to her challenge; "I loved you before I saw you, and after I saw you I loved you more."

She looked persistently out of the window and made no answer.

"Why, then, did you not come?" she asked, tremulously.

"Because of Crampton's death; because I believed you to be a heartless enchantress—a Circe who smil-

ingly gloated over the destruction she had accomplished."

He felt a slightly discordant note in this reply ; but did not know how to mend it. She seemed to slip farther away from him just as she was so deliciously near. His religious scruples—his desire for a higher life than the mere round of selfish pleasure, which had formerly filled his days—he found it impossible to formulate. He could not comprehend the frame of mind in which he must have been, when he shrank from her as from one whose plane of thought was wholly worldly and secular. Grantley with his stern demand : "Thou shalt abstain, renounce, refrain," appeared so alien to his fancy, that he scarcely could understand how they had ever been drawn so close together. The higher life—the life of renunciation—the life of the spirit—what queer phrases indeed in the presence of this imperious, primitive passion of love, which comes like a storm into some lives with rumbling thunder and scorching lightning, and into others like a still small voice, divinely sweet and gentle, but on that account none the less imperious.

"Oh, but I can not hope to make you understand it," he murmured, pleadingly. "I shall only make things worse by explaining. You must trust me a little. You must believe that I love you."

"I do believe you," she answered, softly.

He stood now close behind her ; and by an indomitable impulse his arm stole about her waist. A lovelier face no man ever saw than that which she lifted toward him, her eyes dewy and bright, her lips smiling, her cheeks aglow with a sweet confusion. He made no feint of resisting the invitation of those smiling lips,

but stooped down and kissed them. The rain with a wild burst of vehemence deluged the windows, blotting out both earth and sky.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A SISTER OF CHARITY.

CURIOUS affinities are apt to spring up among people who have nothing to do. In Rome nobody who pretends to be anybody has anything to do ; and therefore Americans who lived next door to each other in New York have to cross the ocean in order to get acquainted. In the Eternal City all the world has such a delightful air of leisure. Everybody has time to display his attractive side, if he has any. Characters which seemed arid and commonplace at home expand luxuriously and blossom out with unsuspected charms. After two months' companionship with the Coliseum and the ruined palace of the Cæsars, Delia Saunders found it less incumbent upon her to reform the world, and George Talbot found it less likely that he would dethrone Raphael. Delia, being conscious of the insidious influences of antiquity, roused herself, however, and in order to regain her self-respect made an occasional onslaught on Christianity, and called upon Cardinal Jacobini, the Papal Secretary of State, whom she endeavored to convince of the virtues of the emancipation waist. She had the brilliant idea that if she could obtain the indorsement of the Vatican for her invention and get it introduced in the convents it

would be a magnificent advertisement. If she should succeed in using the tremendous machinery of the Roman Church for her sanitary propaganda, she might securely repose upon her laurels, knowing that her cause would triumph. She was positive that she had made an impression upon the cardinal, and wrote an enthusiastic letter about him to the "Woman's New Era." But all her hopes were dashed to the ground when in the second or third interview he informed her that his interest was wholly unofficial, and that moreover her invention would be of no use in the convents, as nuns did not wear corsets. This was a crushing blow, from which it would have taken another some time to recover. But Delia was of a sanguine temperament and constitutionally irrepressible. She lost her respect for the Catholic Church, to be sure, of which she had recently been inclined to take a favorable view, and held it now responsible for all the ills and misfortunes of man. But she looked the world in the face with the same bold and cheery disrespect as before, and presented outwardly an aggressive front to all the shams which she persisted in detecting about her. The only one whom she allowed to suspect that she had lost heart was Sir Percy.

It was wonderful how the eccentric baronet had gained her confidence. He had quite ceased to apologize for her now, nor did he say, as before, that she amused him, but he allowed the world to talk, and frankly acknowledged the charm of her companionship. Their first serious *rapprochement* took place during Talbot's illness after his amatory sufferings and his frustrated duel with Count de Saint-Réault. Delia then descended uninvited upon the Palazzo Altemps,

put the wretched Roman nurse to flight, and assumed sole charge, basing her right upon a mythical friendship which had existed nowhere but in her own imagination. Talbot was then so low that both the Italian and the English doctor thought his chances of recovery scarcely worth considering. It was an acute case of Roman fever, they said, contracted by the usual imprudence of Americans. Sir Percy, who had grown very fond of the young man, walked about the house like an uneasy ghost, scolded the servants, poked the fire vindictively, found his tea, his beefsteak, and his wines abominable, and exhibited other symptoms of distress. He could have embraced Delia when she came like an impudent angel and relieved him of all responsibility. She knew exactly the right thing to do, and seemed to bristle all over with competence. Her very presence in the sick-room seemed to charge the air with an invigorating quality which communicated itself to the invalid. Though he had no sentimental regard for her whatever, he was inclined to attribute a healing virtue to her touch. Her cool, soft hand upon his forehead felt inexpressibly grateful, and the brisk and efficient way in which she performed all the little offices for his comfort made him do penance in his heart for his past conduct toward her. He dimly apprehended (as soon as his consciousness reasserted itself) that his recovery was a question of nursing rather than of medicine; and he knew, too, that the Italian nurse, who had slept peacefully through the night after having commended him to the protection of all the saints, had thrown his clothes upon the bed, in anticipation of his death, because, according to Italian custom, whatever is found upon the bed at the

time of the demise is given to the nurse. It was not pleasant to feel one's life ebbing away among such harpies, and the mere sense of security inspired by a familiar face and a familiar voice was a more powerful restorative than all the drugs in the *materia medica*.

It was odd that none of those who knew the Fair Pagan attributed her invasion of the Palazzo Altamps to a desire to fascinate Sir Percy. It seemed inconceivable that a young lady who found her chief amusement in shocking people, and who never made the faintest concession to the world's prejudices, should be setting her cap for anybody. Even Mrs. Douglas, who was not given to be lenient in her judgments, could find nothing worse to say than that it was the alluring impropriety of the thing which had fascinated her. To descend, uninvited, upon two unprotected gentlemen, take full charge of their affairs, and rule them with a rod of iron—it was just the sort of thing which would appeal to her lawless and erratic fancy. It was a practical demonstration of woman's superiority which no man in his sound senses could deny.

What Sir Percy's sentiments were on the subject no one had the courage to ascertain, as he had taken care to drop some remarks which made it unsafe henceforth to speak lightly of Miss Saunders in his presence. He treated her with the most delicate consideration while she remained under his roof, and would have offered her a permanent abode there, with all the privileges and immunities that thereunto appertained, if the occasion had not seemed a trifle inappropriate. The bed in which the patient lay was a great mediæval affair of carved oak, with Adam and Eve and the Serpent in bold relief, and a canopy with

heavy drapery overhead. It stood in the middle of the floor on a raised dais, like a royal couch, and had two steps leading up to it. Sir Percy liked to sit on one side of it and watch Delia's plump and cheerful face, illuminated by the lamp, and her fearless blue eyes, which seemed to challenge creation in general. He had never enjoyed such familiar companionship with a woman before, and had never suspected that such funds of sentiment were stowed away in the out-of-the-way nooks and corners of his soul. He had been disposed to look upon himself as a constitutional bachelor—one of nature's bachelors, as he was fond of saying—and had contracted all the habits and eccentricities which belong to that unsatisfactory estate. The only sentimental episode in his life had been his worship of Constance Douglas, who had been unkind enough to refuse him. But it appeared to him now that he had never really loved Constance. He had a boundless admiration for her, a worshipful loyalty and enthusiasm, but scarcely any tenderness. She always dwelt, like Saint Simon Stylites, on the top of a lofty pedestal, and allowed no one to come close enough to her to feel the warm touch of human sympathy and love. He concluded that a less statuesque bride might bring him more happiness, and with every day that went he became more convinced that Delia Saunders, if she could be induced to exchange her deplorable name for that of Lady Armitage, might make a very acceptable English gentlewoman. He had the delicacy, however, not to give Delia any direct hint of the thoughts which agitated him while she was his guest, but was content to make himself preternaturally agreeable, hoping that she might draw her inferences. It

is not at all unlikely that Delia did have her suspicions as to the motive of Sir Percy's amiability; but, if such was the case, they in no wise influenced her conduct. She was as cheerfully combative as ever, and asserted her heretical opinions with a courageous disregard of their effect upon her interlocutor.

"I must lead my own life," was the refrain of all her conversation: "I can not, without loss of self-respect and injury to my character, lead your life or anybody else's life. I am Delia Saunders, and when John Smith comes to me and asks me to be Delia Smith, I answer, 'No, thanks, John, not unless you choose to be John Saunders. Exchange is no robbery. If it is a mutual compact we are making, and you insist upon my giving up my name and taking yours, I want you to do as much for me.' That's what John doesn't like, and off he goes in a huff and marries a little meek nobody, who has no individuality to give up, and whose charming little soft and dimpled nothingness is contentedly absorbed in his life and sacrificed to his pleasures. That is the scheme of creation, Sir Percy, and I don't mind telling you that I don't approve of it. You know, though I was born in Indiana, I am a very considerable somebody, and am determined, first of all, to be fully myself. I am a very positive bundle of qualities, some of which might prove an unpleasant discovery to the man who had the boldness to marry me, when, the day after the wedding, I untied my bundle and began to exhibit them, one by one."

It is needless to say that Sir Percy found this discourse extremely amusing, and in the depths of his masculine self-confidence vowed that, if she gave him

the chance, he would teach her better things. He had an idea that Delia's convictions sat very lightly upon her and were held partly for their picturesqueness. A firm masculine hand (such as he prided himself on possessing) could, as he imagined, easily weed them out. She was a woman, after all, however much she appeared to protest against the fact, and in all fundamental qualities was not different from the rest of her sex. The longer he gazed at her fresh and altogether girlish face, whose beauty was heightened by the subdued light of the sick-room, the more he was disposed to overlook the unpalatable circumstances in her career and emphasize the essential human traits to which there could be no objection. He could not deny that the emancipation waist and her lecturing for temperance did not please him; but what was the advantage, after all, in having an exalted position and a superior intellect, if they did not raise him above the vulgar prejudices which dominated the mob? He had, as he well knew, a reputation for eccentricity. People rather expected him to do odd things, and if he surprised them by an odd marriage they would accept it as a confirmation of their own judgment of him and as an evidence of his consistency.

It was a severe blow to Sir Percy when Talbot began to mend so rapidly as to furnish no further excuse for the presence of his entertaining nurse. She was herself the first to perceive that the situation no longer warranted her in remaining, and no persuasions could induce her to change her mind. Neither Talbot's prayers nor Sir Percy's arguments were of the slightest avail. She donned one of her rakish hats with smiling composure, fixed it at the right angle before

the mirror, patted Talbot on the head as if he were a little boy, and slapped Sir Percy lightly with her glove when he ventured to compliment her on her appearance. There was nothing for the latter to do but to order his carriage and to accompany her in state to her lodgings on the Piazzzi di Spagna. Talbot wept a few furtive tears when she was gone, only to give vent to his feeling of desolation and general wretchedness. When he tried to lift his hand to his face it felt large, clumsy, and heavy as lead. He took a few tentative steps about the room, with the assistance of Watkins, but the soles of his feet seemed full of tiny needles, which pricked and tickled him, and his knees were so weak that they knocked against each other like those of a new-born calf. Having finished this hazardous journey, he begged Watkins, in a hushed and tremulous voice, to bring him the portrait of Miss Douglas which stood on the table in Sir Percy's library. It was touching to see how his emaciated features lighted up at the sight of the beautiful face, and how, like a Brahmin lost in divine contemplation, he drifted away in blissful reverie from the consciousness of all earthly sin, and care, and sorrow. Unresentingly, uncomplainingly, he resumed his worship of the goddess who had undone him.

CHAPTER XXIX.

LIFE'S FLORESCENCE.

THE tramontane had been blowing steadily for a month, and there were health and vigor in its breath.

The spring slipped away like a pleasant tale that is told. The bright sunshine poured down in divine profusion from the sky. The deep azure canopy of the heavens was fringed at dawn with a pale rose and at evening with a pale saffron edge. It seemed as if no sorrow could endure the gaze of that clear, undimmed sun, as if no heart could be heavy where the earth and the sky united in an irresistible invitation to be gay. And yet there was misery in the Eternal City, and doubly acute for its contrast with Nature's smiling countenance. Talbot, after he had recovered sufficient strength to resume his interest in life, went about with a dull heart-ache, wondering how the world could revolve so gayly and the sun shine so blithely while he was so drearily wretched. The Count de Saint-Réault, too, had acquired a lugubrious mien of late, and there were those who asserted that his wooing no longer went as smoothly as before. However that may have been, it was undeniable that he no longer cruised as breezily along, with all his sails to the wind, as in the early part of the winter, and there was less rattle and clicking of metal and creaking of leather when he entered a drawing-room. The scabbard of his sword knocked less recklessly against the furniture, the jingle of his spurs sounded less aggressive, and even his well-waxed mustache had lost its beautiful needle-points and drooped in a dispirited fashion. It was by no means the count's intention to advertise his reverses, but he was so constituted that he could not keep up the luster of his outward magnificence unless he felt the inward stimulus of success. He had always been the spoiled child of Fortune—had always basked in the rays of prosperity and general admira-

tion. And now to think that the lady whom he had honored with his homage could in pure wantonness maltreat him, preferring to his company that of a commonplace American! He had a suspicion that Grantley was in some way responsible for his ill luck, and he burned to avenge himself on that "accursed *curé*," as he called him. But that Constance, even if she had been informed of his *liaison*, could be imbued with "those petty *bourgeois* notions of morality" seemed, after all, incomprehensible. Yet he could hardly escape this conclusion, for he now had an experience which, two months ago, he would have declared to be simply impossible. He had presented himself three times in the same week at the Douglas apartment, and each time been told that Miss Douglas was not at home, although he had watched the house for hours and seen her enter without again departing. He had seen the odious Burroughs ascend and descend the broad stone staircase and remain for hours within the shelter of those walls which he strove in vain to penetrate. And what was far worse, he noted, with a Frenchman's eye for detail, how his rival seemed to be expanding into a fuller bloom of health and joy. He walked with a happy unconsciousness of the soil. A deep satisfaction radiated from his features. The world was bright and fair. God dwelt at the roots of things and guided his creation aright. The count flushed with anger and mortification at the sight of such beatitude. It seemed a robbery from himself; and he itched to do the robber bodily harm.

It was one afternoon, toward the middle of May, when the world was deluged with flowers, that Julian was with a loudly-beating heart mounting the staircase

of the Palazzo Barberini. Though it was the twentieth time, at the very least, that he pulled the brass-handled, embroidered bell-cord, his pulses bounded like those of a lover stealing to the secret rendezvous. The door was opened by the chambermaid, Hortense, whose good-will he had bought by liberal *douceurs*. She smiled straight into his face with a sly significance, which told him that he need not trouble himself to wear a mask in her presence. He would, under ordinary circumstances, have resented such familiarity; but his happiness made him lenient toward all the world, and a community of experience, in this enchanting chapter, makes all flesh akin.

In the inner drawing-room—a large, high-ceiled apartment, whose palatial bareness was relieved by an abundance of bric-a-brac, and some cracked and smoky canvases in tarnished frames—he found Constance awaiting him. As she advanced toward him with her sweet face, and her stately form, and all her rustling drapery, his nerves tingled anew with the sense of her loveliness. How rare, how noble, how wonderful she was!

“Julian,” she said, looking up at him with gentle reproach, “I have waited for you a whole hour. Where have you been?”

“I am sorry you have waited for me, dearest,” he answered, seizing both her hands, and drawing her up to him; “I have just packed Grantley off to England. The train left fifteen minutes ago.”

“You’ll miss him very much, won’t you?” she queried, with eyes that implored a negative reply. For she was dimly jealous of everybody who had a high place in his regard.

"Oh, no," he answered, accommodatingly. "I could never miss any one as long as I have you. Besides I have made arrangements with Grantley that he is to come to New York. I have finally persuaded him that he can do more good there than anywhere else. I'll build him a church, if necessary; and it can never fail that he'll be a great success there."

He had not spoken in a boastful spirit; but the magnificence of his proposal, perhaps, on this very account, impressed her. It seemed a fine thing to have a lover who could speak of building churches with such grand *nonchalance*.

"I'm afraid you care more for him than you do for me," she declared, with a vaguely troubled air, as she seated herself at his side on the sofa.

"Oh, my sweetest girl, how can you talk so foolishly," he cried, with a laugh.

"I fear, Julian," she began, after a reflective pause, "I shall torment you horribly by my jealousy. I am sometimes myself frightened at a certain wild imperiousness in my love for you. I could endure no one, man or woman, to share your love with me; I could endure none second to me, scarcely any one third."

No lover was ever troubled by this kind of confession, and Julian laughed again, with a happy unconcern, and kissed the hand he held in his own. "You stand alone, and incomparable," he ejaculated, gayly; "beside you, no one else has any existence. I see, I hear, I feel no one but you. You pervade the air I breathe, and you fill my soul like a rapturous intoxication."

Her eyes grew lustrous, and hung on his face while he spoke with tender brightness.

"I have been walking in the sun," he remarked, after a while, "I feel deliciously weary."

"Let me order you some lemonade," she said. "Or do you want claret?"

"Don't trouble yourself."

But she had risen already and rung the bell. Hortense appeared, received the order, dropped her courtesy, and departed.

Constance and her lover sat for a while in silence, awaiting her return. There was something warm, softly caressing, and yet subtly stimulating in the air that blew in at the window. They breathed more deeply, and there was a vague oppression in the fragrance, and a misty veil of indistinctness fell upon their thoughts. When Hortense made her entrance with the claret, Constance arose quietly, took the decanter, and poured out a glass for Julian. He drank it, thanked her, and jumping up paced the length of the floor. She crossed over to the other side of the room and seated herself upon a lounge between the two windows. The breeze blew a loose lock of hair across her forehead, and the sunshine falling upon her hand as he raised it, showed her fingers in rosy translucence. She lapsed into an exquisite languor; her eyes seemed fixed on vacancy; but her face was bright and sweet, and its beauty shone with a soft splendor. Julian was still pacing the floor. Suddenly he paused in front of her, flung himself down at her side, clasping her in his arms, cried: "Oh, Constance, Constance, how adorable you are!"

She yielded to his embrace almost passively, smiling at him with large, moist eyes, and heaving a long, ecstatic sigh.

"Speak to me, speak to me," she whispered; "tell me that you love me."

He opened his lips as if to speak; but said nothing. Her head sank upon his shoulder, and he felt her hair graze his cheek. It seemed so wonderful; so wildly and utterly inconceivable. Those great bright coils of blonde hair with the burnished sheen in them—to have them so close; to inhale their perfume—it invested his life with a new and joyous dignity. And that neck, how touchingly feminine it was with its white slenderness, and the deep groove under the occiput, where the hair grew in capricious little glistening curls. How could life ever lapse into its former insignificance after a moment like this?

I do not know how long they sat thus silently lost in joyous contemplation of each other. There was a glad confiding affection in her glance which aroused a host of good resolves in his heart. He would dignify this love of his by making it an inspiration for civic usefulness, for philanthropy and good works. He would rise by means of this love to the full stature of his manhood. He would never again lapse into his former ignoble ease; he would never live for the sordid gratification of the senses. He would lift this glorious woman into the new sphere of his thought; share with her his aspirations and ideals; bear her tenderly upon loving hands through life; and rise to something great—he did not know what—by the noble stimulus of her companionship. He seemed so mighty, so powerful in this moment. His soul had burst into splendid bloom. His life had reached its flood-tide. He had never before been so intensely conscious of living. How could he doubt that he could bend her

thoughts and aspirations into the same channel as his own? The future seemed so bright, so alluring; no cloud obscured the horizon; everywhere long shining vistas, full of light and color.

An hour later, when the sun had dipped behind the cupola of St. Peter's, Julian emerged from the vestibule of the third floor of the Palazzo Barberini, happy and radiant, like a young god. His eyes sparkled, and he held his head high, as if he felt the pressure of an invisible crown. There was buoyancy in his stride, and he struck his heels against the marble stairs with a vigor which betrayed zest in existence.

"Such an hour
When the shriveled life-germs burst into flower,
Compensates in a breath
For the chill and the darkness of death."

CHAPTER XXX.

AN EMBARRASSING CONSCIENCE.

JULIAN awoke the next morning with a sense of oppression which was, perhaps, the natural reaction from the beatitude of the previous day. Any approximation to the supreme moment to which we would say: "Stay, thou art fair," is apt to be followed by hours which we would fain bid depart. A thought which he strove to drive away kept continually recurring to him. If Constance knew him as he actually was—if she knew a certain regrettable chapter in his past—would she then love him? Was it not Cramp-

ton's idealized portrait of him, rather than his actual self, which she loved? She had indeed, herself, confessed that she loved him before she saw him; and when she saw him his apparent indifference was all that was needed to complete his conquest. He had to live down this fictitious heroic character, before he could be sure that he possessed her love. But that was a most dangerous experiment, and might result disastrously. Nevertheless it was, on that account, not to be shirked. It was his plain duty to unmask himself, if consciously or unconsciously he wore a mask. If his christianity meant anything, it meant absolute truthfulness and scorn of disguises.

After having listlessly completed his toilet, he ordered his breakfast in his sitting-room, but was unable to eat. He drank a cup of coffee which scalded his tongue, and began to pace up and down the floor, catching glimpses every now and then of his troubled face in the long mirrors. He strove to persuade himself that this superfine sense of duty was quixotic and fantastic—a mere passing, morbid whim. He tried to assert the world's common sense view which scouted and ridiculed such ethereal obligations. But for all that his newly awakened conscience refused to be quieted. She must marry him with her eyes wide open, knowing what he was and what he had been. But was he equal to accepting the fate of Count de Saint-Réault, whom once she had favored and obviously dismissed for a similar reason? For, though Grantly had never alluded to the subject in his presence, Julian had incontrovertible evidence that Constance knew of the count's adventure with Gabriella. And her present aversion for him had evidently no

other cause. Now, had he, Julian, who scarcely was less guilty, the courage to court a similar disaster? He pondered the painful problem, weighed the *pros* and *cons*, but could arrive at no decision. When she trustfully placed her fate in his hand, granting him the intoxicating privileges which were to dignify, enrich, and ennoble his life, would it not be peculiarly base on his part to take advantage of her innocent faith in him, and knowingly deceive her? The fact that such deception is commonly practiced did not give the matter a better look; and after a long and bitter struggle Julian resolved to make a frank confession to Constance, and if necessary bear the consequences of his follies. But in the depth of his heart he hoped, nay he believed, that she loved him enough to pardon his past.

He did not delude himself as to the difficulties which this confession presented, and twenty times, at least, he depicted to himself the scene with all its embarrassing possibilities. How he would act in this case or in that, and what he would say, was mentally debated. Half a dozen times he walked to the gate of the Palazzo Barberini before he found courage to enter. It was then about eleven o'clock; and the sun was high in the heavens. He was met by Constance with an affection that was frank and warm like the sunshine itself. There was a sense of sweet proprietorship—of exclusive possession—in the way she put her arms about his neck, and gazed at him, and clung to him, and smiled at him with undisguised fondness. Nay her lips, with their soft, dewy curves, turned so temptingly toward him—how could he resist their enchanting invitation? What absorbed him and

filled him with an exquisite tenderness was—what shall I call it—the touching suggestion of infancy, which clings to a lovely woman during the first hour after awakening. Constance had the peculiarity that she waked up gradually from the time of rising until an hour after breakfast. The mists of slumber lingered in her eyes with a dewy brightness which was adorable.

Julian's determination resolved itself into the most intangible vapors in the presence of a happiness so overwhelming. He sat silently gazing at Constance, while the blood throbbed in his temples and he strove faintly to gather his faculties. She scarcely appeared to notice his preoccupation, or found it perhaps quite natural. She talked tender nonsense to him, coaxed him to smile, twirled his mustache, made experiments with his hair, to all of which he submitted with a sense of guilt which no blandishments could banish. She accepted readily his proposition to take a walk; and when she left the room to change her costume, he had an opportunity to curse his weakness, and to try to prop up his tottering resolution.

When she reappeared, at the end of half an hour, she was arrayed in a buff walking-dress, simple in design, but quietly effective and a marvel of taste and fit. There was an immaculate freshness and distinction in all her belongings which appeared to him miraculous. The sunlight poured down pitilessly. They lingered in the grateful coolness of the corridor, reluctant to plunge into the dazzling glare.

"We ought to have started earlier," said Constance, opening her parasol; "there is actually a sort of fierce simmer in the heat."

"I'll order a carriage, if you prefer it."

"Oh, no, that would be no walk. We can keep on the shady side of the street. But the season has changed in a night. Yesterday, there was yet spring in the air. To-day it is full summer."

"Yes, yesterday it was spring," he repeated pensively, as they emerged from the great gateway and traversed the court-yard, flooded with sunlight.

They walked along in the shade for half a dozen blocks; but the buildings opposite, baked by the sun, radiated an oppressive heat, and Constance, who was sensitive to the least discomfort, paused repeatedly, and looked appealingly at her companion.

"I wish we had not been so rash," she said.

"Let us go into the church, there," he proposed, "the Santa Maria Maggiore. It is sure to be cool there."

"But that terrible length of stairs, Julian. It seems a risky undertaking."

"Take my arm. We'll risk it together."

She shielded him with her parasol as they mounted to the entrance of the church, which was covered by a leather mattress. The cool twilight within was most grateful. A multitude of tapers burned about the high altar, gleaming like isolated points of brightness in the solemn dusk; and the sun sent shafts of jasper, sapphire, and ruby radiance through the great rose window. Big, glowing drops of blood-red light trembled upon the walls, and brought illusive blushes to the cheeks of the emaciated martyrs. Priests and acolytes in embroidered garments flitted to and fro; making preparations for a service that was about to begin. The air vibrated with the deep, but subdued

tones of the organ, which sounded like the distant mutterings of the wrath to come.

The august splendor and dignity of the church made a profound impression upon Julian. All doubt and hesitation vanished from his soul; and he felt the strength within him to act in accordance with the dictates of his conscience. He had a sensation as if a shield had been lifted above his head—as if he had stepped into the shadow of the Almighty's wings. The air was heavy with incense, and the music, with its solemn monotony, tuned him up a full octave above his everyday self. It had the same effect as one of Grantley's talks, which chased all petty considerations and mundane fears out of sight, and awakened aspirations for a nobler and worthier existence. And by some strange jugglery of his fancy, Constance underwent a transformation. She became again Circe, the pagan enchantress, whose alluring and dangerous charm dragged him down into the life of the senses, whose sweet siren voice, ringing beguilingly in his ears, lulled him into a pleasant languor, and made his spiritual struggles and yearnings seem foolish and futile. Such a bright and lovely daylight creature, accustomed to flattery and homage from her earliest years, kept in studious ignorance of all that was unpleasant—how could she ever have learned that life has a sterner side? How could the depths of her nature ever have been stirred, even granting there were depths to stir?

"I like to walk with you, Julian," she said, clinging to his arm, unconscious of the disloyal thoughts that were flitting through his brain; "it seems so nice to be alone with you—you and I only, and no one else."

She looked up at him with such a ravishing smile, that, though he was troubled at heart, he could not help responding to it.

"I like to walk with you, too, Constance," he said; "I like to drift through the world with you, not knowing where we are going."

"That is exactly what I mean," she answered, with a glance in which there was a little questioning ghost of seriousness; "things look so different when I look at them with you. I have been in this church a hundred times; but I never discovered how beautiful it is until to-day."

They sauntered leisurely through the monumental pomp of marble tombs and porphyry columns, and found themselves by chance in the gorgeous Sistine Chapel.* The mass was now being celebrated before the high altar; but under the vast dome of the church the chorus of angelic boy voices with the deep organ accompaniment was scarcely more than a melodious murmur, a softly surging sound, which rose and fell rhythmically upon the air, and moved the heart and was silent. Julian felt a sudden moisture in his eyes, as he stood and listened. He looked at Constance, but she only smiled, as she always did, when her eyes met his; but seemed wholly unmoved.

"I am a little tired," she said, "let us sit down."

She released his arm, and seated herself on the steps of the Pope Sixtus's tomb. On the wall *vis-à-vis* hung Ribera's great picture of St. Jerome beating his poor withered breast with a stone.

* The Sistine Chapel in the Santa Maria Maggiore, not the Sistine Chapel in the Vatican,

"I never could understand," began Constance, after having looked for a while at the picture, "why that poor old man is maltreating himself so."

"He is subduing the flesh," Julian replied at random.

"Ah, but you can't do that with a stone," she ejaculated with the same cheerful indifference.

"How would you have him do it?" he asked with a sudden portentous gravity.

"I," she exclaimed, in a tone of surprise; then, as the meaning of the question dawned upon her, she turned away to conceal the blush that flared out upon her cheeks: "I don't know that I ever thought of it. But I fancy St. Jerome must have been a coarse man to employ such coarse means."

"He was a scholar of rare accomplishments; and, no doubt, a gentleman."

"I shouldn't have suspected it."

The boy chorus here burst forth in a triumphant:

Gloria in excelsis Deo!

the organ poured forth a rapturous strain; and the swinging censers exhaled clouds of perfume. Then a male chorus began to sing, now in parts and now again in unison, a long penitential supplication full of the austerity and majestic simplicity of the early Latin hymns. It was easier to speak, with disregard of conventionalities, under the shelter of this solemnly monotonous chant. Constance was still gazing with a wondering interest at the emaciated saint, when he found courage to say:

"I think I can sympathize with him. There have been moments in my own life when I could have beat-

en my breast with a stone. Ah, my sweet girl," he hastened to add, in a tenderer tone, "there is a baser alloy in the nature of man than you, in your innocence, suspect."

She fixed her eyes upon his face with a puzzled, half-timorous smile.

"You are jesting, Julian," she said; "but why persist in jesting about such a disagreeable subject?"

"No, I am not jesting. There is something I must tell you. I shall not have peace until I know that you have forgiven me."

The smile died out of her face, giving way to a look of alarmed apprehension.

"What would you say to me, Constance," he began, a strange shiver creeping over him while he uttered the difficult words, "if I told you that I am not what you believe me to be; if I told you that there is an episode in my past which I would give years of my life to have blotted out?"

He bent a serious, beseeching gaze upon her; but she looked away, moving her foot uneasily upon the mosaic pavement.

"Is it—is it—anything—with a woman?" she finally managed to stammer.

"Yes."

"Oh God," she murmured, flashing upon him an implacable look of resentment and scorn, "why did you tell me this?"

"Then you can not forgive me?"

He scarcely knew how he contrived to bring forth intelligible words, for his tongue seemed thick and unwieldy, and his breath stuck in his throat. She had risen now and stood at his side, calm but flushed,

and with dilated eyes and an expression of injured majesty.

"I could have forgiven you for deceiving me," she said slowly and bitterly; "but now—now—you have made everything impossible. I could never look at you, or speak to you again."

The music streamed forth anew with an accelerated tempo, rumbling in the bass and shrilling with seraphic tremolos in the treble. Julian felt as if the mighty flood of sound were vibrating through his own nerves. He felt dizzy; the floor undulated under his feet. The saints gazed down upon him from out of their aureoles with blurred and distorted features. An instantaneous doubt of the reality of the whole scene flashed through his brain. Was it all a dream? Something like it—the very same thing, in fact—had occurred before; in a previous existence, perhaps, or in a trance. It had an oppressive, nightmarish air of familiarity. And this woman whom he loved—how she had changed in the twinkling of an eye into something hard, implacable, Medusa-like—so different from what he had imagined her. He questioned for an instant whether he really loved her as much as he had believed. But the pain that nestled about his heart; the bitter regret at her loss; and the dull vacuity which he foresaw his life would be without her, convinced him that he could hope for no surcease of sorrow from that source. He was moving mechanically at her side in the startling silence which emphasized the cessation of the music, marveling at the resonance of his footsteps against the tombs opposite. He lifted up the mattress that covered the door and saw Constance pass in front of him in all her distracting beauty; and the

rustle of her garments had something touching about it, something wildly alluring that trembled through his soul with a despairing sense of regret. He had expected to speak to her at the parting, which he felt to be final and irrevocable; but both voice and thought forsook him, and he remained standing at the head of the long flight of stairs, seeing her slowly descend, her face in a golden glow from the lining of her parasol, and never once turning her head to look back at him. She knew as well as he that one relenting glance would have brought him again to her side. But a rankling resentment, strangely mingled with mere perversity, restrained her from yielding to a conciliatory impulse which now and then asserted itself. A revulsion akin to loathing—a sense of insult at having been brought in contact with something vile and low—made her shudder, and draw herself up with a haughty resolution to repel all overtures for a reconciliation.

When she had turned the corner of the street, Julian leaned up against the wall of the church and tried to take his bearings. The familiar world before him affected him with a strong repulsion. His head was heavy. He was conscious of nothing but a dull heartache and a sense of annoyance at the glare of the sun. His tongue was dry, and he had a bitter taste in his mouth. A curious disposition to yawn took possession of him. While he descended the long staircase his thoughts were confused; and even his sensations were indistinct and blurred. He knew dimly that his life was ruined, and he beheld a barren, sunless future stretch out drearily before him. Once or twice he stopped in the shadow of a house and wrung his hands. For the life of him he could

not recall the mood of exalted virtue which had made the confession seem imperative. The suspicion ached like a sore within him that it was all unnecessary, gratuitous, unpardonable. It seemed almost callow. Was it possible that he had made a fool of himself? He hated the lofty abstractions, the bloodless, impossible ideals by which Grantley regulated his conduct, and which he had striven to emulate. It was they that were responsible for the disaster which had overtaken him; for the loss of all that made life valuable. And what had he gained in return? Not even the barren consolation of an approving conscience. "Vanity, vanity, vanity of vanities," he murmured bitterly, as he mounted the stairway of the *pension* in the Piazza di Spagna. He seemed to himself a shade in a world of shadows.

CHAPTER XXXI.

PENITENTIAL YEARS.

JULIAN lingered for three days in the Eternal City, in the hope of receiving some message that might alter the complexion of his future. But no message came. Then, after a desperate battle with his pride, he began to hover about the neighborhood of the Palazzo Barberini, in the hope that the sight of him might arouse some tender memory and make merciful counsels prevail; and at last he rang the bell of the apartment on the third floor, and was received by Hortense with a face full of intelligent sympathy. But Hortense's mistress refused to receive him. She was and remained

invisible. There was to him something positively insulting in the formal announcement that she was not at home.

He roamed about aimlessly during the afternoon, and found himself at sunset at San Pietro in Montorio, where there is a beautiful view of the Campagna. There, to his surprise, he was confronted with Sir Percy and his cousin Delia, who told him, without circumlocution, that they were engaged and were going to sail without delay for the United States, where they meant to celebrate their wedding. They were evidently prepared for opposition on his part, and were not a little astonished at the readiness with which he acquiesced in their plan.

There was nothing to detain him in Rome now; and the sooner he could bury in oblivion the memories with which the very stones were eloquent, the better he would be content.

He accordingly lost no time in securing passage for New York; and during the first week in June he embarked with Delia and Sir Percy at Liverpool. Delia then confided to him the history of her engagement, to which he listened with a faint show of interest. Sir Percy, it appeared, after a futile struggle, had conceded all her points concerning woman's superiority to man, and her consequent right to take a leading rôle in literature, science, politics, etc., which concessions, in turn, had given Delia a high idea of Sir Percy's intelligence, and enabled her to discover in him a multitude of virtues to which previously she had been blind. And the long and short of it was that, after having refused Sir Percy, she had begun to feel sorry for him; and that had led to a still tenderer emotion. She re-

peated, with strenuous emphasis, that she was in love with Sir Percy, and looked at Julian with a humorous challenge in her eyes, as if she expected him to contradict her.

They were received at the pier in Hoboken by old Mr. Burroughs, who looked as hard, and shrewd, and contented as ever. It was an odd fact that it always took a week or more before Julian and he could get on easy terms after a longer separation. They had to renew each other's acquaintance; and it was obvious that the son's rigid dignity seemed to the father to imply a rebuke of his own jerky and slipshod bearing.

"Well, Jule," he said, looking uneasily about him, as he wrung his son's hand, "where is the girl?"

"She is in Rome," Julian answered with a frown and a flush which were lost on the old man's cheerful obtuseness.

"I thought you wrote you was going to marry her," he persisted, with a mien expressive of the liveliest interest.

"I was, but she changed her mind."

"Oh, fiddlesticks! You never knew how to handle the girls, Jule; that's what I've always said. They want to be coaxed, don't you see. They expect it; they wouldn't respect themselves if they didn't kick up a little row occasionally, just for the fun of being tickled, and petted, and coaxed back into good humor. But you, Jule, you take them too seriously; you haven't got any circumspection. Oh, Lord! don't I wish I had been there to help you! I should have settled that pickle for you in a jiffy. It's too bad, it's too bad!"

The old man walked off, shaking his head with an air of serious annoyance.

"I had made the house all ready for her," he resumed, when he had walked off his displeasure; "and now she ain't coming, you say. I can't somehow get used to it. And all the bad pictures in your rooms—those that would be embarrassing, don't you know, to a young woman—I have taken down and moved to the garret."

"I wish you wouldn't say anything more about it, governor," said Julian with a chilling loftiness, which the Honorable Abiel could not fail to understand.

"Well, well," he muttered with a half embarrassed nonchalance, "I suppose it is all right. But it's too d—— bad, all the same."

It was a fortunate circumstance to Julian that his father felt it incumbent upon him to show some attention to Sir Percy, who lingered in the city for a week, previous to his departure with his bride for Indiana. For the old man had a way of unwittingly scorching his finest sensibilities and making all that he touched seem mean and sordid. It was partly as an escape out of himself and the despairing monotony of self-reproach and regret that he wrote to Grantley, urging him to redeem his promise without delay. He felt a need to lift his eyes again toward the heights "from whence cometh help." And he turned instinctively to Grantley as the only man he knew who brought consolation in his voice and healing in his wings.

Toward the end of September Grantley came, and was induced to take up his abode temporarily under the Honorable Abiel's roof. But quite abruptly, at the end of a week, he left and engaged lodgings in Baxter Street, one of the vilest and most miserable quarters of the city. And in answer to Julian's anxious queries,

he quoted the passage of the Bible concerning the difficulty for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. "I was being petted, and spoiled and pampered, my dear boy," he exclaimed hotly; "the trouble was, I liked it. I had to run away while there was yet a spark of the spirit of Christ left in me."

The two next years of Julian's life were occupied almost exclusively in philanthropical enterprises under Grantley's direction. He built the promised church, not as he had intended, for the fashionable world, on Fifth or Madison Avenue, but, at his friend's urgent request, in the midst of the slums. He was violently aroused from his indolent sloth by the things he saw and heard—horrible beyond conception. His sentimental sorrows—keen though they were, like steel in his flesh—seemed intangible, misty, and unsubstantial in the presence of hunger, filth, and wasting disease. The barren dreariness, discomfort, and monotonous toil of the lives which three fourths of the human race are doomed to live seemed to him a perpetual accusation against himself, who, by pure chance, without a shadow of merit on his own part, had been placed in circumstances of opulence, refinement and ease. If he failed to live a noble life, how manifold greater was his shame than that of the helpless, ignorant wretches who had inherited brutal passions, and passed their years in tenements where the common decencies had to be disregarded for want of room? An infinite charity and tender fellow-feeling for all who suffered became lodged in his heart. The ascetic zeal was kindled again within him, and there were moments when he would gladly have surrendered all his advantages in order to gain that cheerfulness in renuncia-

tion, that serene contentment in well-doing, which made Grantley seem the most enviable of men. But Julian, as he was well aware, practised altruism with an ulterior purpose, not because it gave him pleasure, still less because he was impelled by a sense of duty, but because he needed something to fill the aching void within him. He hoped to find healing, as Faust did after his harrowing experience, in useful and unselfish activity. But the very fact that he was conscious of such a motive robbed his benevolence of its healing virtue. A ravenous heart-hunger came over him at times, and he would lose interest in every one's affairs but his own. Nay, there were even moments when his own concerns ceased to interest him. What was he? A mere animated grain of dust whirling through the vast space. He would lie for hours on his sofa trying to realize the idea of the infinite—boundless blue expanses behind boundless blue expanses—vast, shining globes spinning about central suns, myriads and myriads of worlds, some slowly evolving out of nebular chaos, some teeming with a vigorous, feverish life, some past their meridian, slowly waning toward all-engulfing chaos and destruction. A nightmarish sense of the futility of all things would then oppress him for days, and he would walk about as in a trance, staring with a puzzled blankness at the variegated panorama of the great city, but seeing and hearing its sights and sounds as in a troubled dream. He would repeat to himself as he walked the awful verse of Omar Khayam :

“ When you and I behind the veil have passed,
 Oh, but the long, long while the world shall last,
 Which of our coming and departing heeds,
 As heed the seven seas one pebble cast.”

In the background of his thought lingered always the image of Constance; and, though he strove to banish it, it would often start up suddenly in strong illumination. His memory played him all sorts of tricks, recalling her voice, her eyes, her dress, her gait, by the most incalculable association of ideas. Often from weakness, perhaps, or from acute regret, a sudden moisture would suffuse his eyes at the recollection of some look of hers, some sweet intonation of her voice, some impulsive caress, or tender nonsense. Time seemed to make no difference in the vividness of these memories. The regret was as acute as if they had parted yesterday. All women seemed commonplace, crude and shrill, when compared with her; their talk like meaningless cackle; their arts stale and unpleasant; their vivacity like that of an automaton, pulled by unseen wires.

He found it hard at times to forgive Grantley for the share he bore in his misfortune. But he fought this feeling as unworthy of him, and never allowed the clergyman to suspect that he held him in any wise responsible. The more astonished he was to discover that his friend had long since divined the state of his feeling.

"Look here, old man," Grantley began, one evening, as they sat smoking together in Julian's library, "I want you to give yourself the comfort of abusing me. I know exactly how you feel about a certain matter which I won't say anything about. Now, it is a natural feeling, and if you speak out freely you'll more easily rid yourself of it."

"You make me ashamed of myself, Grantley," Julian answered; "I owe you so much."

"That's all right, my boy," the clergyman interrupted; "but keep that for some other time. Now I want you to abuse me."

"I can't abuse you. I'll admit I've felt unkindly toward you at times—"

"Why don't you say you've hated me? I'm sure I should have hated you, if the case had been reversed."

"No, I've never hated you—at least, never in my sane moments."

"And, now, what do you propose to do?"

"What do I propose to do? What would you advise me to do?"

"I don't dare to advise you. I want you to tell me if you have any plans."

Julian smoked for some minutes in silence, staring through the smoke toward the ceiling.

"Well, I have a plan," he said, at last, "but I doubt if you will approve of it."

"Why not? Let us hear it."

"I am going back to Rome."

"Good!" cried Grantley; and, jumping up, he grasped his friend's hand and pressed it heartily—"That is as it ought to be."

Julian was so surprised at his ardor that he scarcely found voice to answer. The thought darted through his brain that Grantley, perhaps, spoke from a more intimate knowledge than he himself possessed. Had he remained in communication with Constance, or had he friends in Rome who reported to him? A joyous tumult of imagination drove the blood to his face. He rose, took a turn on the floor, and, with a voice ringing with decision, he repeated: "I am going to Rome."

He would have liked to ask Grantley whether his surmise was correct, but it seemed somehow like flying in the face of Providence. What if it was not correct? A certain coyness and reticence, concerning all matters relating to the affairs of the heart, was innate in his character; and he could not bring himself to say another word on the subject.

But three days later he sailed for Liverpool in the Umbria, and early in October he registered at the Hotel Costanzi in Rome.

CHAPTER XXXII.

COLLISIONS.

AMERICAN reputations, as we all know, have to be made in England if they are literary, in France if they are artistic. It is only our political reputations which we make at home. The rising celebrity to which I am about to refer was a pictorial one, and accordingly had to compete for Parisian laurels. It was in the *salon* of 188-, two years after the occurrences narrated in the previous chapters, that George Talbot succeeded in attracting the attention of the august personages who preside over artistic destinies. All his friends, except Sir Percy and Lady Armitage, *née* Saunders, who now regarded him as a prodigy, prophesied failure unless he dined the critics of the most influential journals or provided bacchanals *à la fourchette* with champagne and sirens from the Opéra Bouffe, after the inspection of the pictures on Varnishing Night. The

young man, impractical as ever, declared, with much heated rhetoric, that he refused to sneak into the temple of Fame by a back door; and his friends retorted derisively that he would remain forever a sojourner on the staircase, a perennial candidate, perennially shut out. But they changed their tune when the "Figaro," the "Journal des Débats," and "Le Temps" pronounced his two canvases, "Enchantment" and "Renunciation," the most notable pictures of the Exhibition. Neither seemed in the least ambitious. Any one but a connoisseur would have passed them by. One represented a blonde young woman in a Greek shepherdess costume seated on a rock, while a young man, lying on the ground, was gazing with a rapt look into her countenance. This countenance was, as a piece of pictorial individualization, simply marvelous. Never was the soul of an enchantress more subtly and yet more nobly conceived. It was not a coquette, not a shallow siren, but a great, passionate, yet innocent woman, the embodiment of some grandly mysterious force of nature, wielding a power which she did not herself comprehend. And yet every feature was so clearly and definitely modeled, and the individuality so complete and so penetrating, that it haunted the mind like an importunate melody. The landscape, too, with the goats and sheep and beathery hill-slopes, had the same exactness, the same convincing veracity in every detail. "It told its geological history as plainly as does Nature herself, and might," said the "Figaro," "give points to the botanist."

The picture entitled "Renunciation" was of a wholly different character. It represented a narrow Roman street by night, through which a funeral was

passing. Priests and penitents, carrying burning tapers, were walking behind the coffin, chanting their lugubrious chants. In the front row a delicate emaciated face was seen lighted up by a taper, and a pair of dark eyes flashed forth from under the cowl with a glance of despairing recognition at a lady who stood on the sidewalk. They were so close to each other that they could clasp hands. The yet unsubdued spirit, the hopeless impassioned cry for life and joy and love, it was all expressed, and potently expressed, in that glance. Of the lady's face so little was seen that her emotion could only be conjectured. But the story was trenchantly told, and the tremendous energy of suffering in the priest's features revealed (to quote "Figaro" once more) the painter as "a man of sorrow and acquainted with grief." It was all so personal, so acutely felt, and unerringly accentuated. It was strongly hinted that the blonde priest's face was that of the artist himself. That he had not attained to any state of peaceful renunciation might well be conjectured. The nirvana of passionless contemplation of the beautiful, which he had recently proclaimed as the ideal condition of the artist, was as far beyond his reach as ever. But his one great experience, and the suffering it had brought him, had enriched and ripened his character, and given him a grip on the actualities of life which promised yet nobler works in years to come. There was one thing yet which he desired supremely, and without which, as it appeared to him, all other things were valueless. It was the same object about which his thoughts had revolved since the day he arrived in Rome, and presented his letter of introduction to Constance Douglas; and now, in the first

flush of his triumph, while he rarely took up a newspaper without expecting to find some mention of his name, his first thought was again of Constance Douglas, and he hastened back to Rome to lay his new-won renown at her feet.

It was on the eighth day of October, 188-, when there was already a ghost of coolness in the shade, though the sun yet shone with undimmed splendor, that Talbot, ascending the Via delle Quattro Fontane, observed on the sidewalk opposite a familiar figure, which seemed to be wending its way in the same direction as himself. His heart sank within him, and in his limbs he had a strange sensation of numbness. Was it possible that he was too late? Had the discarded lover been taken back into favor again? Talbot took off his hat and wiped the perspiration from his brow with his handkerchief. He felt a trifle dizzy. In the meanwhile the obnoxious Burroughs was pressing on. He noticed that he looked serious. There was no unusual elasticity in his step. No joyous exhilaration in his features. Perhaps he was about to try his fortunes for the third or fourth time like himself. In that case, it was of importance to be first on hand. The race was to the swiftest. Talbot redoubled his speed, and almost ran up toward the gate of the Palazzo Barberini. But, for all that, he found his rival waiting for him when he arrived.

"How do you do, Talbot?" asked Julian, shaking his hand with unaffected friendliness. "I take it we are both on the same errand. You are going to call upon Miss Douglas."

"Yes—yes, to be sure," answered Talbot, wonderingly. He felt shaken, undone. An hysterical anxi-

ety made his voice unsteady, and an overwhelming pity for himself summoned tears into his eyes. It was obvious that Burroughs had drawn the prize after all. He could not otherwise have afforded to be so magnanimous.

"I suppose you have kept up your acquaintance with the family all the while," Julian observed, looking intently at the ground, while poking the ferrule of his cane into a hole in the pavement.

"No," replied Talbot, still more amazed, "I have been living in Paris during the last two years."

"Ah, indeed."

The situation was now perfectly plain to Julian. Talbot had come to dazzle Constance with his new-won fame, in the hope that she might relent. He noted with amusement the obtrusive stylishness of his attire, and a certain Parisian *chic* in his boots, his neck-tie, his cane. His fine, silky hair had been shorn of its exuberance, and his mustache, which was as yellow as ever, had grown thicker and acquired a smart curl at the ends; and, to cap the climax, he had raised a goatee *à la* Napoleon III.

"I suppose," he managed to stammer, while his virginal blush mantled his cheeks, "I suppose—that's to say—I presume you have been in Rome for a good while."

The purport of this question was so transparent that it would have required more *sang froid* than he was possessed of to utter it without embarrassment. He was prepared for a snub in reply, and conceded that he deserved it. But Julian's manner reassured him.

"I arrived to-day," he answered, simply, "and I

think, on the whole, I will postpone my call. Will you do me the favor not to mention my name to Miss Douglas?"

Talbot's eyes dilated with amazement. Was he playing a very deep game, this high-nosed young nabob, or was he simply an idiot? Not mention his name! No, to be sure, he would take good care to keep mum on so ticklish a subject. He needed no urging to grant that favor. He resented his rival's imperturbable manner, which contrasted so glaringly with his own breathless excitement and haste. "Well," he ejaculated, in a cheerfully fortuitous strain, "I am glad to have seen you. Sorry you won't come up. Hope to see you soon again; I have no permanent quarters yet, but will let you know when I've found a roosting place."

They shook hands once more, and Talbot, betraying his anxiety to be off, darted up the stairs, as if he were afraid to give Julian time to reconsider. A vague misgiving did, indeed, invade the latter's mind as he saw the artist vanish beyond the second landing, and heard his eager footsteps on the marble. Was he not rashly challenging fate? Was he not a second time staking his happiness on a very slender chance? But if Constance could listen to Talbot's suit—if she could as a mere *pis aller* put up with that fantastic and excitable boy, simulating an affection for him which she could never feel, had she then not fallen from her high estate, was she not then unworthy of the deeper and stronger and nobler love which he bore her? But then, again, there are all sorts of little complications in a woman's life which have and must have weight in such a decision, and which may drag her

down from the heroic altitudes into the depths of sordid and humiliating necessities. All these possibilities passed through Julian's mind, while he promenaded up one street and down another, always keeping the gate of the palace in view. As the slow minutes dragged themselves along, he began to repent of the advantage he had granted to Talbot. He foresaw the long, dreary days and nights of the future, when he would consume his soul with regrets for not having accepted, at any price, the happiness that perhaps had been within his reach. No one can force his own terms upon fate; he must accept whatever terms he can get.

For half an hour Julian walked up and down, struggling with these uncomfortable reflections. Then as he ascended for the fourth time the slope of the Via delle Quattro Fontane, his heart suddenly leaped into his throat. There was Talbot, rushing blindly ahead, with a sullen gloom upon his face which advertised the result of his wooing. The joy that lit up Julian's features at the sight of his discomfiture dealt him a wound which long continued to rankle. The reproachful, suffering glance which he sent his former friend, as he entered the gate, sobered the latter and made him ashamed of his triumph. Why must he buy his happiness—if, indeed, it was to be his—at the expense of another's pain? But, after all, it was foolish of Talbot to raise his eyes so high. The moth has no business to desire the star. It was a case of misplaced affection. There was a natural fitness in all things; and if Talbot had perceived it, he might have been saved immolation upon the altar of an unrelenting goddess.

It was with an irrepressible trepidation that Julian

mounted the stairs and rang the door-bell. He had to restrain his desire to shake hands with Hortense when she opened the door for him.

"*Mon Dieu M. Buroz!*" she exclaimed, with her most brilliant Gallic smile, "*est ce que vous avez tombé des nuages?*"

She was obviously glad to see him; and he regarded that as a good omen. In recognition of her partisanship he gave her a friendly nod, and while she drew aside the tawny draperies, entered the beautiful little Renaissance *salon*. He expected to compose his soul in patience knowing that he would have to wait. And he needed time to quell the agitation which the sight of all these dearly familiar objects aroused. There was a distinctly Roman flavor in the decorations and atmosphere of the room—such a delightful old-world frivolity, sobered into a kind of historic dignity by the lapse of time. When he thought of his American life and surroundings, in the presence these relics of a venerable past, he found it hard to believe in their reality.

He was in the midst of this little reverie, which had relieved the strain of his expectation, when the door to the adjoining room was opened and Constance stood before him. He arose slowly and advancing toward her pressed her hand. The tenderness, which always welled up from his heart at the sight of her, gushed like a warm current through his veins, and dimmed his eyes. There was a rare and exquisite quality in her beauty which touched him. It set her apart from all other women as much as if she belonged to a separate species. And yet his first glance told him that she had changed, though it was difficult to define

the change. It was the change that a melody undergoes in being transposed into minor. It was yet the same Constance, with the same stately erectness, the same noble dignity. But in her eyes there was a gentle sadness and in the lines of her lips a touch of pathos. She impressed his vision as a soft, rich minor strain impresses the ear. Instead of the placid self-sufficiency of former days—the pagan equilibrium and serenity of soul, as Talbot put it—there was a vaguely appealing look which betrayed unrest and suffering. Her smile was less brilliant, less self-confident, but still inexpressibly sweet. Her attire, though fashionable and in admirable taste, seemed less striking, less aggressively stylish and voluminous.

“It is a long time since we met, Miss Douglas,” he began, a little awkwardly (for it seemed impossible to find a remark that seemed natural), “I hope you have not—forgotten me.”

He could not tell whether it was joy or anxiety which made his heart beat so loudly and set his blood afire with unutterable longings.

“No, I have not forgotten you, Mr. Burroughs,” she answered, unembarrassed by the intentness of his gaze; “I hope you have been well. Won’t you please be seated.”

There was to him something farcical in the exchange of these formal civilities between two people who had once been to each other what they had been. It was like the preliminary “shamming” of fencers before the real fight begins. And yet he had no choice but to persevere in the key which she had chosen.

“I hope Sir Percy and Lady Armitage are well,” she observed, with an animation which sprang from

another source than her interest in Sir Percy; "I am told they have opened the house at Donnymere, and that Sir Percy has become a country gentleman."

"Yes, since his son was born he has sold his collection of shells, given up his eccentricities, and become the most devoted and chivalrous of husbands. It was Lady Armitage who made him stand for Parliament, and there are even those who say it was she who elected him. At all events, she developed a positive genius for electioneering. But it is told as a joke that in return for the concession she made in becoming Lady Armitage, without insisting upon his becoming Mr. Saunders, he had to assume her politics, and I half suspect that when her son grows up she will, in pure self-defence, have to assume his. Sir Percy, you know, was formerly a Tory, but she has made him a Liberal."

"I wish you would give them both my kindest regards. *A propos* of Lady Armitage I can not help telling you something which quite touched me. When she became engaged to Sir Percy, two years ago, they came here to call upon me. On the way Sir Percy indiscreetly confessed that he had once made me an offer of marriage, whereupon Miss Saunders promptly sent him home and called upon me alone. She talked about everything under the sun; but, although she was dying to say something about her engagement, she departed without having alluded to the all-absorbing topic. I was not well at that time, and she feared that she might in some way hurt my feelings."

Julian listened with polite attention; but began to feel a dim resentment against his cousin for absorbing so much precious time that might be more agreeably

employed. He felt half-inclined to give vent to his chagrin by observing, what was incontestibly true, that Lady Armitage's conversational license had grown upon her since her marriage, and that she positively reveled in physiological improprieties. She had recently written a pamphlet (which out of regard for Sir Percy she had published anonymously), in which she debated the question whether the father or the mother had the greater share in the character of the child—and it is needless to say that she decided in favor of the latter.

Mrs. Douglas, who had grown old and paralytic since Julian last saw her, was wheeled into the room in an invalid's chair, and stayed for an hour. She complimented Julian upon his appearance, and urged him to stay to dinner.

The meal was served in a small, boudoir-like room, painted a warm red, with a procession of naked genii laden with culinary dainties dancing along the frieze. An aged and solemn butler, who served simultaneously in two families, moved noiselessly about the table and uncovered the dishes. The conversation, which was kept up from a sense of duty, acquired an air of conscious futility. Julian yearned to be alone with Constance, and pour out his soul to her. He longed to know her troubles, her hopes, her wishes. As he sat opposite to her at the table and saw the shaded candle-light upon her noble face, and heard her soft, sweet voice, his imperious love, hidden under the ashes of conventionality, began to send forth little ruddy jets of flame. Whatever she said, her words touched some new stop and opened a new flood-gate of pent-up feeling. It was not because she was still beautiful, nor

because she was noble and accomplished, that he loved her, but because she was Constance Douglas, the woman who had humiliated him and exalted him, who had been his misery and his happiness, who with a listless hand had struck the keys of his nature and drawn from them a storm of discords which was now being lulled into harmony.

After diuner, Mrs. Douglas begged to be excused, and was wheeled back into her sleeping-room. Julian, after having bidden her good-night, followed Constance into the drawing-room. The air was warm, and the moonlight was pouring in through the large windows.

"Ah, this is glorious!" he exclaimed. "Do not let us have any lamps. Let us luxuriate for a while in this delicious twilight."

She made a sign to the butler, who was entering with two lamps, and he retired, leaving them together in the moonlight. They went to a window and looked out upon the Eternal City, with its towers and cupolas emerging out of the dusk. The mingled perfumes of roses and orange-blossoms were wafted up to them from the garden below. The stone-pines and ilexes stood veiled in shining mists, like stately ghosts wrapping their shrouds about them. Far away a melodious church-bell began to tinkle with a faint, clear sound; and, when it ceased, a bird began to warble down in the orange-trees. All the world lay steeped in a soft, magical radiance, like a bright, blissful dream.

"Life is beautiful yet," he whispered, letting his glance range over the moon-flooded landscape.

"There was a time when I thought so," she answered, with that little intangible sigh which was like a pathetic undertone in her speech. It was the note

for which he had been waiting ; it gave him that assurance for which he had hungered.

“ Constance,” he cried, trembling with a passion of anguish and delight, “ have you forgiven me ? ”

“ Oh, don’t let us speak of it ! ” she pleaded, with anxious haste, as if eager to push the memory out of sight ; “ I have punished myself much worse than you.”

She stood silent for some moments, and her face, touched with the pallor of the moon, seemed to him wondrously sweet and pathetic. He was yearning to clasp her in his arms ; but there was something in her reserve which he was impelled to respect. Suddenly she turned away from him, went to the piano and opened it. She struck the keys softly, and wandered away in a musing prelude, which gradually gathered into the exquisitely sad and tender melody of Elaine’s “ Song of Love and Death ” :

“ Sweet is true love, though given in vain, in vain,
And sweet is Death who puts an end to pain :
I know not which is sweeter, no, not I.
Love, art thou sweet ? then bitter death must be :
Love, thou art bitter ; sweet is death to me.
Oh, love, if death be sweeter, let me die.”

He stood again at her side, and felt, with a subdued agitation, the bliss of being near her, of having won her confidence, of having the privilege of sharing her troubles.

Her fingers lingered on the keys, and again hovered away in a shadowy voluntary, in which there rose out of sorrow trust and hope and consolation. She looked up into his face while she played, and saw the tender

luster of his glance, and the faithfulness—the stanch and beautiful faithfulness—which had endured through trials, rebuffs, and humiliations.

“I love you, Constance,” he murmured.

“And I love your constancy,” she answered, with a faint smile.

He seized her hand and drew it gently through his arm, as she rose from the piano.

“Promise me,” he said, “that you will no more sing that heartrending song.”

“No,” she replied, with a look which made his heart leap; “henceforth I shall sing—

‘And sweet is Love who puts an end to pain.’”

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